

Ark Volume 10

Act 1: Deimos' Profession?

The player's pet 'Deimos' has reconstructed all the parts of his body!

Usually the undead is formed because of a strong grudge or a curse. These are the sources of their power, making them jealous of the living. The undead cannot live anywhere because of that hostility. Unfortunately, Deimos' evolution wasn't completed because of the roughly assembled body made of cheap bones. But now it can be exchanged for 208 bones and the 'Perfect Skull.'

Now that all the parts are fused together and is optimized to fit the body, Deimos will get a chance for a new evolution.

'Roughly assembled? Cheap bones?'

Ark's face distorted oddly. There was the old saying that said people should not bite at sore fingers. Ark also felt that way about his pets. He had lovingly cared for his pets. He gave them good food and built them a body. Educated them and treated them like his children.....

But even though he treated them well, his children didn't act the same way. As the parent, he put a lot of affection into raising his children. Although Dedric was a little careless, he was a cunning fellow with a strong survival instinct from his childhood as a bat. Radun was always wound around his waist and never caused trouble. On the other hand, Deimos was just a skull when they met for the first time. He had no skills except for rolling around. Didn't he used to be thrown at monsters in order to deal some damage? Ark was the one who made him a complete skeleton body. Of course it was no easy task. He had to memorize a book JusticeMan lent him on the human body for several nights. But was that all? He looked through hundreds and thousands of skeleton bones for pieces that would fit together like a jigsaw puzzle in order to create Deimos. Deimos was truly Ark's creation.

'Has any other summoner suffered so much in order to raise their summon? But it is not all bad. I'm filled with a sense of pride when I look at what I created.'

He secretly felt proud whenever he looked at Deimos. But now he had to suffer through the disgrace of his hard work being called a loosely assembled body? He felt furious at an information window for the first time. No, it wasn't just the information window. Even though Ark made it with difficulty, Deimos didn't like it and decided to just get rid of it using Bone Collecting? To the extent that he completely changed 208 bones? He had accepted it since changing the bones meant raising his stats, but now Ark completely felt betrayed.

“Deimos, it’s good that you might evolve……but were you so miserable that you had to change all the bones?”

“Oh, have you finally realised Master?”

Dedric sensed the mood and teased as he approached Ark.

“I told you so from the beginning. From the very first, this guy did not like the body that Master endured so much suffering to make. In order to obtain a stronger body, he was pretending to like it while patronizing you. He is that type of guy, a cunning child! Although he appears outwardly loyal to Master, you really can’t trust the undead. Don’t you know they only think about bones?”

Dedric smiled as he continued bad-mouthing Deimos.

“I didn’t want to mention this, but do you know how many times I’ve heard him swearing at Master?”

Clack clack? Clack clack clack clack!

Deimos was astounded and rushed towards Dedric. However, Dedric expected it and quickly hid behind Ark.

“Look at this, he’s revealing his true colours! He’s trying to cover up the truth! He said that Master was a tyrant who treated us like trash……cough, M-Master?”

“This child, did you think it was settled?”

Ark grabbed Dedric by the neck who immediately screamed.

“C-choking! Why are you doing this? I’m just repeating what that skeleton said!”

“Do you think I’m a fool? If you want then I’ll really throw you in a body bag and use you as dog trash!”

“Eh? Is that so?”

Dedric became frightened and avoided Ark’s eyes.

“Hey, why are you scared? I just gave you an example.”

“Oh, really?”

“You’re not angry? Master’s heart is like the sea. It is spacious.”

"No, I am a stingy tyrant who treats you like trash."

".....Master, you knew?"

Dedric faked a pitiful expression.

However, Ark just nodded with a cold look.

"I know very well."

"Dammit, whatever! I'm free to say whatever I like so just get it over with!"

Dedric desperately lay on the floor and closed his eyes. There was no need to bother describing what happened afterwards. When Ark showed an upset countenance, Dedric immediately took the chance to drive a wedge between Ark and Deimos and was punished for it.

Ssak ssak ssak ssak! Clack clack clack clack!

Ark was also Radun's dad (?). Radun became upset at Dedric's words and stepped all over his feet. In addition, Deimos also smacked him with his shield before he evolved. Thanks to Ark and the two summons, Dedric was crushed in a matter of seconds.

"Waaaah, okay, I'm the bad guy."

Once Dedric was in a critical condition with tears dripping down his face, he huddled in a corner and shouted.

"Bah, Deimos, you hit me as well? Are you already acting so arrogantly before you even evolved? Don't be ridiculous. You'll see in the future! I'll soon evolve into a great pet. When the time comes, neither you or Master will be able to treat me like this!"

"At any rate, that guy....."

Ark smiled sourly and shook his head. So far, Dedric's abilities have never been lower than Deimos'. Since he evolved first and was punished more often, he ended up eating more new dishes than Deimos. Thus he was always ahead. But now the situation would be reversed when Deimos evolved. Dedric didn't like this. Dedric was cunning but that was his limit. So his behaviour was understandable.

"Well, he has to evolve anyway."

Ark stared at Deimos.

Since it had come out of nowhere, it still hadn't sunk in. In fact, Ark thought that the evolution of pets was only available through a Magic Sword. It was the reason he often browsed the auction site for Magic Swords. If he could evolve his pets then he considered buying it. As his pets were important, Ark was determined to evolve them.

'But I never imagined that he could evolve in such an unexpected way..... Will he evolve into something different from the Magic Sword? Or did he have to evolve first using Magic Sword before evolving through different methods? Will it also depend on the pet's stats, skills or alignment?'

He was unsure about what would happen. It was one of the bad things about hidden professions. A hidden profession was different from normal classes. All information related to that profession was unknown and had to be discovered first hand. Ark had no choice but to play it and learn. This was particularly true in regards to his summons. Of course, New World had other professions with the ability to summon. The main professions were necromancers or shamans. Initially, Ark looked at their information as well. However, both professions were completely different from Ark and his summons. For a necromancers, summons were just like disposable items for them. They could summon a large amount but once the duration was over then they disappeared. The concept of growing their summons didn't exist. By growth, he meant raising their skills and stats.

For a shaman, they were similar to Ark in that they summoned a spirit and raised it. However, the spirit grew when the user's related skill grew. In other words, if the shaman's summoning skill reached intermediate then their spirit would also become intermediate. So the information on necromancers and shamans weren't useful for Ark at all. Anyway, Ark's profession was not focused on summoning. So the Dark Walker's complex pet system felt like a significant penalty. But he soon saw that there was some merit to it.

'I thought it was natural to give my pets battle training.....'

That wasn't the actual case. The necromancer's and shaman's summons had no will of their own. If their master didn't give a command then they wouldn't move. When their stats rose, they could learn a few simple patterns. But they couldn't participate in a battle on their own like Dedric and Deimos. In addition, using food to raise stats did not work.

'Their ability to grow and think is also an advantage.'

Ark laughed as he looked at Dedric still complaining. It was also a busy atmosphere. At first he found it quite annoying, but now he couldn't imagine

playing New World without his summons there. Spending a few days and nights soloing was also possible because of his pets.

‘Ah, now is not the time to be thinking of these things.’

He had become distracted because of Dedric. Ark shook his head and looked at the information window again. The question about whether to evolve was flickering in front of him.

“Since I don’t know what will happen anyway, Evolution!”

Deimos was finally going to proceed with his second evolution.....that was his thought. But New World wasn’t that simple. When the information window disappeared, a huge disk appeared in front of Ark. It was a giant roulette wheel made of bone that was divided into colours, with one single finger bone attached at the top as a pointer.

“What is this?”

Ark was perplexed as another information window appeared.

Deimos’ ‘Special Evolution’ will now begin.

At present, Deimos’ bones is composed of 32% warrior, 27% thieves, 8% magicians, 15% undead and 18% other things. The number of professions he can evolve to is 17 types. However, the player won’t be able to choose the occupation of the summon. The great power who watched over the Netherworld will choose the most suitable profession for Deimos depending on his stats and alignment.

“What, what the? He can evolve into 17 different types of professions?”

Ark muttered with a silly expression. When they evolved using the Magic Sword, they received the profession of the former owner. But now there was no owner of the magic sword to give a profession. Instead, the profession was gathered from the bones. Thanks to that, Deimos had the opportunity to change into many different types of professions. Indeed, there were the names of professions written on different sections of the roulette disk.

“This means that he can change professions into one of these?”

Ta da da da da!

Then before Ark could read the names written on the roulette, there was a strange sound and it spun around. The roulette gradually slowed until it landed on one

point. The roulette board was divided into small and large spaces, and it had landed on the most spacious part. The problem was that there was no name written on that portion.

“Why did nothing happen?”

Ark became anxious.

Pepepepeng!

Deimos suddenly wobbled and kneeled down after the noise. At the same time, a message window appeared in front of Ark.

The great power that oversees the Netherworld did not recognize Deimos' evolution.

<Unfortunately, a 'Fail' has appeared. As a penalty, Deimos will permanently lose 200 health. All stats are destroyed by 10. There is 3 evolution opportunities given every 20 minutes. If all 3 attempts fail, the evolution will end and he will receive an additional penalty. However, there is no penalty if you cancel the evolution>

“Huk, what is this?”

Ark stared in astonishment at the information window before looking at Deimos. Just like the message said, he had his health and stats decreased.

‘Dammit, what is the great power who watches over the Netherworld? Isn't this just luck? Is Luck the true identity of the Netherworld's great power?’

Before he could even understand the situation, he had lost some stats painstakingly gained through meals and bone collection. Fury rose in his throat but he pushed it down and endured it for the moment. Although he couldn't tolerate it, what could he do?

“Fortunately there are 3 chances to evolve. If it fails then the opportunity to evolve will completely disappear and a penalty will be received....!”

“There's still 2 chances. No, is this the second time?”

Ark repressed his anger and looked at the roulette. If was necessary for him to understand the situation. He could choose a profession. And obviously it had to suit Ark's profession. Even if he couldn't select the job, he could still examine the options and decide which one suits Deimos the most. The roulette wheel had many types of professions scratched on its bones. Skeleton Captain, Immortal Skeleton, Skeleton

soldier.....occupations associated with warriors, magicians and thieves were all present.

“It is quite vague.....”

Ark scratched his head as he looked at it. It was difficult to choose a profession. Ark's level and stats were considerably higher compared to Dedric and Deimos. Dedric had the ability to fly so he could avoid a monster's attack if he kept to a reasonable distance. But Deimos' position was different. He didn't have the ability to fly like Dedric, nor was he clever. Yet he inevitably ended up fighting monsters head on. Even so, Deimos was capable of keeping up thanks to his knight profession. His defense and health increased and he could block using the shield. No, there was no particular way to utilize him right now. No matter how high his defense became, it wasn't possible for him to fight head on with higher level monsters.

‘If I look at Deimos' overall stats then a warrior or knight profession would add that much. Even if he gained more health and defense thanks to the evolution, the level of the monsters is so high that it wouldn't be enough. The skills associated with warriors are difficult but.....’

Becoming a warrior was still relatively good. The problem would be serious if it landed on a thief profession. Thieves needed to be surprisingly clever. If Deimos switched to a thief then he would be in danger all the time. A magician profession was also impossible. Deimos' intelligence was so low that he might not be able to learn magic and he didn't have enough mana to use it. Naturally magic ate up a lot of mana. A magician with 7,000 mana would run out in one battle. As a new magician, Deimos wouldn't be able to use those skills or be of any benefit to Ark.

‘In addition, a thief and magician has no defense. With the level difference, he wouldn't even last one or two hits before being forcefully recalled. When that happens, I will receive half of his health as damage. His evolution might make a battle even more difficult.’

While thinking about it, Ark came to the conclusion that a warrior or knight was the best option.

‘If he becomes a warrior then his stats will become much higher and I'll be able to utilize him more.’

But the problem was the number of choices. It was at that time. Ark sighed before a surprising profession caught his eye. The job accounted for 2% of the total roulette.

“Huk, that's.....Death Knight!”

Ark's mouth dropped open. He had never directly seen a Death Knight in New World yet. However, of course he knew the name Death Knight. It was the strongest among the undead in all online games, a knight wearing dark armour. The Death Knight!

'As expected from something that relies on luck.....it is right next to the 'Fail.' This is it. The target to win. A smaller assigned space meant a rarer profession. With the bonus stats from evolution, this clearly is the best possible choice for Deimos! With the proper armour then he could fully utilize my pets!

Ark clenched his fists.

-The time limit of 20 minutes has been completed. We will spin the roulette wheel.

Ta da da da da!

The roulette began to turn.

This time Ark was not confused. He had no choice but to pray that it would land on the Death Knight.

"Please.....Please.....Land on it, Death Knight!"

Ark looked like a man holding a lottery ticket as he stared at the roulette wheel. After some time passed, the roulette gradually slowed down.

Bump, bump, the roulette wheel reached the Death Knight area and advanced past.....it did not stop at the last moment.

'God dammit.....!'

-Congratulations. The great power that oversees the Netherworld has acknowledged Deimos' evolution.

The chosen profession is 'Skeleton Merchant.'

This is a very unique profession as the 'Skeleton Merchant' can trade goods with villages and monsters. He will also become more discerning about the various bones and leather used to make new items. However, the pet cannot carry the items directly. Since the Skeleton Merchant cannot deal directly with merchants, it can assist the user with making the various calculations on profit and loss. And the undead cannot trade with hostile NPCs.

<If you choose to cancel the evolution, a penalty will be applied and you can try

again>

A Skeleton Merchant.....It was definitely a ridiculous profession. In addition, the merchant could not hold its own goods. Ark would have to store it and listen to him while trying to calculate a price while trading in stores. How was he supposed to do that? If Deimos became a merchant, wasn't it just like carrying around a portable calculator?

"I would rather have him not evolve!"

Ark would rather have him not evolve then become a merchant!

Ark cancelled the evolution without even considering. There was another boom and Deimos stumbled again.

"Dammit, one by one.....is it going to end up like this?"

Tears gathered as once again Deimos' stats and health were cut. No wonder so many rewards were given at the same time. This could mean the difference between a crisis and an opportunity. After 2 failures, Deimos had permanently lost 400 health and 20 points on all stats. A fortnight? A month? All the stats he raised with great difficulty was gone in over 10 minutes.

'There is one chance left. What if the merchant profession appears again?'

His stats would once again be cut. The worst result! He would've discarded a bunch of stats for nothing.

'If I give up the evolution here then I'll be able to keep the remaining stats.'

But he couldn't regain the stats already lost. In addition, he had just obtained the long-awaited opportunity to evolve. Since it was so valuable, he might suffer a bigger loss if he gave up.

'And to give up the chance to evolve into a Death Knight.....'

It was a huge dilemma. Was this how people who gambled felt like?

A cold sweat started forming on Ark's forehead. Ark wasted time while hesitating. Dedric had been watching from afar and he finally walked closer and mumbled.

"I told you. As an undead, that fellow has no luck. Do you think that an undead has any luck? Lucky would only look good on a noble vampire like me." 함."

“You really are.....!”

“Ah, no, I was just talking.”

When Ark glared at Dedric, he became surprised and immediately closed his mouth. Although anger swelled up inside Ark, there was no time to punish Dedric. 4 minutes had already passed. During the remaining 16 minutes, he had to decide whether to give up or gamble again. But Ark’s heart had already made a decision.

‘This opportunity is too good to give up.’

If he knew all the information then he might’ve given up before spinning the roulette wheel. But he had already begun. He had to continue to the end.

‘Who is to blame? If the stats are cut again then I’ll just feed him food.”

Ark closed his eyes tightly and made the decision to turn the roulette. Then, all of a sudden Dedric’s words struck his frontal lobe.

‘Wait? Luck? Deimos’ luck?’

After receiving a shock, Ark’s frontal lobe began to actively work. Ark had thought the results of turning the wheel was due to luck. However, this place was a game. And coincidences don’t exist in games.

‘Yes, that’s it!’

Ark’s eyes brightened. These days Ark was exceptionally lucky and found good items. But looking back, there was an explanation for this. He had received the ‘Sacred Branch’ from Popo. The option was especially worth noting, with an extra +30 to luck and a +20% chance of finding magic items. Ark had received it before Nagaran and then forgotten about the effects. Then the effect came into play in the Netherworld. Yes, monsters dropping items depended on the results of numerical calculations. And the thing that could be applied in this situation was the.....luck stat!

“Character Information Window!”

Character Name	Ark	Race	Human
Alignment	Good +350		
Fame	9,125 (+500)	Level	253

Profession		Dark Walker	
Title		Cat Knight, Caretaker of the Abandoned, Jackson’s Hero, Great Adventurer	
Health	3,910 (+150)	Mana	4,050
Spiritual Power	200	Strength	503 (+28)
Agility	663 (+55)	Stamina	733 (+20)
Wisdom	87 (+10)	Intelligence	781
Luck	103 (+30)	Flexibility	98
Art of Communication	46	Affection	141 (+10)
Resilience	285		
Special stat: Knowledge of Ancient Relics		138	
* Equipment item effects			
Guardian Armour of the Merpeople: Water Attribute Resistance +100%, Penalty based on water is nullified.			
Cat Paws (Gloves): Attack Speed +10%, Agility +15, Critical Hit +10%			
Raccoons Pith (Helmet): Agility + 10, Wisdom + 10			
*<King> Set effect: Strength + 10, Agility + 10, Stamina +10, Defense +20			
Warrior’s Transcripts (Shoulder Blades): Strength + 3			
Wind Spirit’s Boots (Shoes): Agility + 30, Movement Speed +30%, Attack Speed +10%, ‘Slide’ available			
Galgashi’s Fur (Mantle): Cold resistance +100%, Agility +20, When health is less than 50%, ‘Magic Protection’ automatically activates.			
Adelaine’s Necklace (Necklace): Defense + 40, Affection +10, ‘Blessing of the Sea’ available			

Resurrecting Spirit (Ring): Strength + 5, Mana recovery + 5%

Mind's Eye (Ring): 'Mind's Eye' enabled

Amulet of Vitality (Bracelet): Health + 50, Health recovers by 5 every 20 seconds

Gladiator's Honour (Bracelet): Strength, Agility, Stamina +10, Fame +500, Sword-based Skill Growth +5%

* All abilities will increase by 40% in the dark

* You have the ability to hide in the darkness (20 minutes duration. Cancelled when you get into combat)

* Resistance to Fear, Darkness, Blind, and Seduction spells is increased by 50%.

* You can bring out the true abilities from all types of tools.

* Shock absorption is increased by 20%.

* Poison resistance has increased by 50%.

* 10% increased attack and defense

Ark's luck was currently 103....

With the effects of Sacred Branch, it was 133. However, all his stats increased by 40% thanks to the dark attribute bonus. In other words, the final value was 186. It's quite high compared to other games where the luck stat was generally low.

'It is too weird. My luck is 186, yet first I received the 'Fail' option and the next time it landed on a useless profession for me? If so, my luck isn't applied to this roulette wheel.'

Then the answer was that Deimos' luck stat was applied to the roulette wheel! He opened the information window and saw that Deimos only had 26 luck. In fact, when he first evolved Deimos had 50 stat. But when he used bone collecting, stats like strength and agility went up while luck fell. Ark hadn't really cared about the luck stat. No, he had welcomed it when Deimos' strength and agility went up. Therefore he was caught off guard by this situation.

'Dedric's complaints are sometimes useful.'

If Dedric had not mentioned it, he never would've thought of the undead's luck.

'The waiting time for the roulette is 20 minutes. I had wondered why it required waiting time.....but it turns out to be needed. It is for a skill that can change the rules of the game! If there was 20 minutes available, wasn't there time to change the rules? Anyway, once I know the problem then solving it isn't difficult!'

Ark's face, which had begun to look despairing, brightened.

"There is no time. Survival cooking recipe list!"

A list containing hundreds of different recipes appeared in front of Ark. The remaining time was 14 minutes. Ark used filters to get rid of the unnecessary dishes. There were approximately 40 dishes that gave a 'lucky' effect. But he could only make 5 at the moment.

'Creating 5 dishes can boost the luck by 60. With Deimos' current luck, he would have 86 at most. But there is only a 2% probability of landing on Death Knight. Damn, if I knew that luck was this important then I would've packed extra ingredients to raise it.....'

It was too late to feel regretful.

'There might be a way to raise the luck above 86.'

Ark took out all his ingredients and made a dish. He paid attention to the pot's thermostat and added expensive spices. Then a brilliant light exploded from the pot and a stunning dish was created.

The best 'Four-leaf Clover Pancake' has been completed using Survival cooking!

The pancakes decorated with four-leaf clovers have been cooked well and symbolizes good fortune. Because of the decoration, eating the pancakes will make you feel more lucky. Although it is a relatively simple dish, your sincerity has create an a la carte dish.

<Recovers 400 health over 3 minutes. Luck +15 for 1 hour>

<A la carte bonus: 200 health recovered. Luck +10>

'That's it!'

That's what Ark was aiming for. A la carte dishes provided extra bonuses through sincerity! It wasn't easy to receive the 'A la carte' or 'Miracle Nursing' effects. But now it wasn't an exaggeration to say that life or death rested on the luck stat. The brain scanning unit detected this and he was able to create an 'A la carte' dish.

“What is this? Ah ha, have you finally realized that you treated me poorly? Huhuhu, it isn’t necessary for you to cook for me.....well, I did receive some unfair treatment. Since it’s already made, I’ll eat it well.”

Dedric approached after smelling the fragrant dish.

“Don’t be annoying and go away!”

Ark kicked Dedric aside and fed the pancakes to Deimos.

“Eh? “M-master! Are you really going to act like that?”

Dedric obtained a bruise on his eye and once again started complaining. But he had no time to pay attention to his pet’s feelings.

‘There isn’t a lot of time left. I have to create all the dishes and feed it to him before then!’

Ark quickly made the rest of the dishes. However, he rushed too much and failed to make an ‘A la carte’ dish.

“Damn it! No, it can’t be. Let’s calm down. I can’t rush too much. Come, Dedric eat these dishes.”

“I don’t want to, you petty and dirty....ugh!”

Ark crammed the failed dishes into Dedric’s mouth and took a deep breath. After several more failures, he was able to make an ‘A la carte’ dish.

“Ugh....am I a rubbish bin for food? Gag, I’m about to burst.”

Dedric’s stomach swelled so much that it looked like it was going to burst. Anyway, after making the ‘A la carte’ dishes he was able to raise Deimos’ luck to 140.

“That’s it, this is the best that I can do. 140 is not a small number in regards to luck. I hope it lands on Death Knight.....if not, at the very least a skeleton warrior, Deimos!”

Clack clack clack clack!

Deimos also nodded nervously. At that time the message window showed up.

-The time limit of 20 minutes has been completed. We will spin the roulette wheel.

Ta da da da da!

Ark, Deimos and Radun looked at the wheel anxiously. Dedric was distracted by rubbing his bloated stomach and picking his nostrils. Well, he couldn't break the tense atmosphere as the roulette wheel spun and the bone rattled loudly. Once the wheel start to slow, a sense of anticipation was seen in Ark's eyes.

"Okay, okay, it looks good. Just a little more....a little more.....!"

Ta da da....da da da....da da...da.....

The roulette was close to the Death Knight area. If he measured the distance and speed, there was a high probability that it would land on Death Knight. The atmosphere became expectant like a jackpot was going to appear! Ark, Deimos and Radun tensed up while Dedric rubbed his nose and his body shook violently. The roulette wheel attracted all their eyes as it stopped. Ark's eyes lit up.

"T-that's it....Death Knight!"

"Hu, r-really? A, a, a.....achoo!"

Dedric freaked out with his fingers stuck in his nostrils and sneezed. Then, was this fate's joke? The roulette which had landed perfectly on Death Knight, made a noise and moved onto the next section. Instantaneously, Ark and his summons all froze.

"What, what the? Dedric you.....!"

"It's not me! My sneezing couldn't have possibly moved the wheel!"

Dedric screamed spectacularly. Of course, Ark was also aware of that. If he could've controlled the random roulette that Ark would've already done so. But the roulette had a semi-transparent form and couldn't be touched with his hands. It was just bad luck. But it was still an emotional problem. Since he had been picking his nostrils for no reason, as soon as he sneezed then anger welled up. Dedric sensed the mood and kept quiet.

"My wish!

Ark cried out.

'Dammit, this was a perfect opportunity to evolve into Death Knight..... What other profession is after Death Knight? Skeleton warrior? That is still good.'

Since it was a useable profession, he would still accept the evolution. But when he thought about the Death Knight, Ark couldn't shake off the feeling of tremendous loss.

At that time the message window appeared.

The great power that oversees the Netherworld has acknowledged Deimos' evolution.

The chosen profession is 'Death Master.'

The Death Master is a profession Deimos can evolve into using the knowledge obtained from the necromancer Tamura's skull. There is no public information available on Death Master. After the pet's evolution, a significant bonus will be applied when the player learns skills related to death, and they can even exert power over death sometimes. It is an occupation highly recommended for an undead summon

<This is the player's last chance. If you cancel the evolution then the evolution attempt will end in failure and a penalty applied>

"Yes, a Skeleton Warrior is also useful.....eh? What? Death master?"

Ark murmured in a stunned voice.

"What is a Death Master?"

He hadn't seen that profession on the roulette. Ark thought it was a mistake and approached the roulette closely. Then he realised there was a part he never saw. Between Death Knight and Skeleton Warrior, there was a small gap that wasn't easy to see unless looking with a magnifying glass. And the occupation Death Master was written in a straight line.

"Death master? 'What's this?

He had never heard of this profession.

'The space assigned to Death Master is only 0.5%. Since the probability is so low, it is an even rarer profession than Death Knight.....that means.....the good luck was applied after all?'

Ark looked at the roulette wheel with a strange expression. Although he picked a lot of targets, it was amazing that he ended up with this absurd situation. And the problem was that Ark wasn't aware of what type of profession Death Master was. He couldn't tell by looking at the name or the information present.

'It is a profession with a low probability but.....'

He was somewhat hesitant to choose it.

‘But I don’t have a choice. If this evolution fails, Deimos will lose 600 health and 30 points in each stat. And the chance to evolve will disappear.’

Although the profession was ambiguous, he couldn’t accept the penalty. There was also Deimos’ reaction. Although he looked grouchy when Skeleton Merchant appeared, his eyes were lively once he saw Death Master. It was similar to when he trained Deimos in Bone Collecting and Dedric in Vampirism. Based on previous experience, his pets would listen better when it was something they liked.

“Okay. Let’s just do it. Evolution!”

In the end, Ark choose to evolve and closed his eyes.

Oduduk, Oduduk...!

At that moment, there was the eerie sound of Deimos’ bones changing dramatically. Until now, Deimos had been made up of different parts. The ribs of an ogre, the shoulder bones of a gnoll.....there were various bones of monsters mixed together as well as Andel’s bone. Since it was from different species, the appearances of the bones didn’t match. He was also wearing a ragged cloak and just looked like a pile of trash. But once the evolution started, his bones became shiny and black. A skeleton made of black bones.....and his eyes flowed with a red gleam.

Clack....clack clack.....clack clack clack.....

The sound of his bones also changed and became gloomier than before.

The evolution was successful.

All the components have been optimized to a form suitable for a Death Master’s growth. The great power who oversees the Netherworld has granted the name ‘Razak’ to the Death Master. Razak can now acquire the knowledge necessary for a Death Master.

Razak

A resident of the Netherworld who has evolved after collecting bones. After absorbing the fragment of knowledge from the necromancer Tamura’s skull, his understanding of death has deepened. Although arrogance is in his nature, his loyalty to his Master means there will be an additional bonus applied after learning death related skills. In addition, the performance of his blade has gone up.

Species: Undead

Alignment: Dark

Ranking: Lower class

Health: 1,724 (+ 250)

Loyalty: 620 (+ 30)

Strength: 253 (+ 20)

Agility: 95 (+ 20)

Stamina: 279 (+20)

Wisdom: 58 (+ 50)

Intelligence: 76 (+ 50)

Luck 26 (+10)

* Damage as a blade increased by 7, Durability +50, the range of the whip has increased by 5 metres.

* You have learned the skill 'Death's Equations.'

* You have learned the skill 'Pledge of Death.'

Death's Equations (Beginner, Active): After understanding Death's Equations, you will be able to return the soul of the monster to their body after dying. However, this technique requires the exchange of Razak's bones in order to be successful. The number of bones sacrificed will depend on the status and ranking of the target. In addition, if you offer more than the set value then the stats obtained will rise. The life force of the resurrected target will be restored by 50%, but Razak will not be able to move while controlling the target or the contract will be released.

<A rank resurrection: 3 bones consumed. B rank resurrection: 2 bones consumed. C rank resurrection: 1 bone consumed>

Pledge of Death (Beginner, Active): The Pledge of Death is a way for the pet to show loyalty to its Master.

If the player dies, the Pledge of Death will be activate and the pet will exchange his health with his Master's. However, the pet will die instead and will receive his Master's death penalty of -1 to all stats.

‘This is.....should I be glad?’

Ark read the information window with a dumb expression. After evolving, his stats rose considerably. 170 points were added to health and loyalty. The effect had raised Deimos 17 levels. But as expected, Death Master had a magician characteristic. It focused on wisdom and intelligence rather than strength and agility. However, it was unreasonable compared to a magician. Since he evolved holding the sword and shield, strength, agility and stamina all increased a little bit. Naturally, his defense and attack also rose a little bit. Although Deimos would grow along the path of a magician, fortunately Ark had raised him as a warrior.

‘The increase in blade damage isn’t really meaningful. An 7 point increase in damage meant an attack of 30~42. It is a lot weaker than Gwisal’s sword. While a one-handed sword is quite strong, I’m familiar with Gwisal’s sword so it isn’t necessary to change it.’

But since he sometimes used the whip, the increase in damage was great. The problem was the skills ‘Death’s Equations’ and ‘Pledge of Death.’ He could resurrect dead monsters and use them freely. It sounded amazing but when thinking about it, the technique required sacrificing Razak’s bones every time it was used. It meant that it would cut the stats obtained through bone collecting. Of course, he could always regain the stats back through bone collecting but he didn’t want to sacrifice stats just to raise monsters with 50% of their abilities.

‘Well, it might have a huge effect if I resurrect a boss.....’

But resurrecting such a monster would require 3 bones. Furthermore, it wasn’t possible to go someplace else because Razak couldn’t move. There was also ‘Pledge of Death.’ Instead of Ark dying, he would share Razak’s remaining health. However, it was only good if Razak had a lot of health remaining. If Razak’s health also decreased then Ark and Razak would just lose some stats.

‘I can’t grasp whether the profession and skills are good or bad.’

Ark thought with a strange expression. Prior to the evolution, bone collecting was used to raise the stats. But now the skills created after evolution only decreased the stats.

‘I can’t just excessively use the remaining bones.’

Although Deimos finally obtained new skills, Ark didn’t want to test them out.

‘Overall it is not that bad. Death Master seems like a mix between magician and warrior. Since the attack and defense wasn’t lowered, I’ll be able to use him

sometimes to tank. And the peculiar skills could be surprisingly effective in some situations. Well, now I need to create some dishes to regain the stats.'

Ark was satisfied with the results. The fact that he didn't evolve into a Death Knight was still inconvenient but at least the Death Master profession was somewhat useable. Wasn't it a hundred times better than a Skeleton Merchant? Ark smiled and looked at Razak.

"Okay, now you've evolved. Deimos.....no, now it is Razak?"

Clack clack.....clack clack clack....

Razak leisurely nodded. In fact, this was what he found disagreeable about the evolution. When Deimos was made out of a patchwork of bones, he had a lively feeling. That was his charm.....but now Ark couldn't find that feeling after the evolution into Death Knight. Although it was quite intense, the atmosphere felt more gloomy and drab. Dedric also shot a dissatisfied look towards Razak.

"Sheesh, this conceited child has now completely changed his atmosphere?"

Clack clack? Clack clack clack.....

"What the?" Ha, just because you've succeeded recently? Don't be ridiculous. All you did was pick up some bones in order to evolve! I have inherited the noble blood of the vampires! I can't be judge with the same standards as a brainless child!"

Clack clack clack, ttaak.....clack clack clack clack!

Razak laughed (?) and shrugged his shoulders.

'What, what the?' This bastard, do you think it is settled? Not too long ago you were rolling around on the ground and now you're ignoring me? Do you want to experience that again?"

Dedric huffed and burst out angrily.

"Dedric, stop. Why haven't you calmed down and kept on talking so noisily?"

"What the? Now even Master is ignoring me?"

Dedric's face contorted at Ark's words.

"Are you going to keep on acting like this?"

“Yes, I am. Why? Are you going to beat me again? Go ahead! You think that I’m a vampire who can’t evolve? Ha, good, good! Hit me! Tear my stomach!”

‘Why is he behaving like this?’

Ark sent an absurd look towards Dedric.

Then, a thought popped into my head.

‘Wait? Maybe this guy.....aha, this is good.’

Ark noticed something about Dedric and burst out laughing. If he returned to the past, their relationship when there were a bat and a skull wasn’t that close. Dedric could talk from the beginning and he had a flying ability. So he just ignore the skull rolling around on the ground.

Ark> bat > skull > snake.

That was the ranking in Dedric’s mind. In addition, Ark evolved him first so he really became smug. And that relationship continued even after Skull evolved into Deimos. But this was the first time that the ranking sequence was broken. Dedric naturally thought that he should’ve evolved first. But now Radun and Razak had evolved first, so his sense of security had started to collapse. As a vampire, Dedric was exceptionally proud so this cut like a knife.

“Laughing? Am I funny? Dammit, don’t laugh! I am Dedric!”

‘Okay, it is a very good reaction. Why didn’t I think of that?’

Ark finally noticed why Dedric was grumbling like a little kid. He tried it out. Even if Razak had a high degree of loyalty, he still made them eat food. There were no problems. Dedric was the one who always complained but that didn’t happen this time.

‘That’s right, trying to balance the two of them might’ve been a mistake. Now Dedric’s pride won’t allow him to complain about food just in case the gap with Razak widens. Kukukuk, this is an effective new method.’

Thanks to his show of weakness, Ark had caught the rebellious Dedric in his claws.

‘This guy is clever but he still acts like a little kid.’

Ssak ssak ssak!

At that time, Radun who had been wandering around returned. There were 200 dead Nakujuk in the underground square. Radun had swept through every corner and obtained 300 japtem. Although there were no special items, the overflowing number of items was still worth a large amount of old so Ark was happy. After finishing everything, Ark went up to the 2nd floor where everyone was waiting.

“Now, let’s go.”

“Bah, pah, sheesh!”

Dedric grumbled and followed behind them.

Act 2: Deception

TL Notes: I’ve changed Dueraken to Draken.

Guran, Bona, Lariette and Buksil were gathered on the 2nd floor. Guran and Bona were talking about what happened in the previous days while Buksil was looking at the footage on the magic projector. And Lariette was still organizing her skills, with the relevant information window open.

“Ark-nim, have you finished your business?”

Guran stood up when Ark approached.

“Yes, it is finished.”

“I have to thank you once again. If it wasn’t for Ark-nim...Bona-nim.”

When Guran looked at him, Bona immediately bowed his head.

“.....Thank you for saving me.”

Although he hadn’t noticed it before, Bona was quite a cute-looking boy. But when he wore a white hat, he really looked like a smurf.

“Are you uninjured?”

“Yes.”

"Then I am even more thankful. I'm glad you're safe."

Ark gave him an affectionate look and ruffled Bona's head. Dedric looked like he was going to vomit at Ark's words, but Ark was being 100% sincere. Since Bona was safe then Ark would be able to receive the compensation for the B difficulty quest.

'Huhuhu, now I can obtain items from the smurfs.'

Ark seemed to drool as he looked at Bona. However Bona didn't know Ark's true feelings and blushed so red that he could be mistaken for a Nakujuk.

"I.....I.....I'll be a great warrior just like Ark-hyung. I'll defeat the Nakujuk that threatens my clan."

He had no interest in that. But treating NPCs well was Ark's slogan. Ark nodded his head as if he was proud of Bona's words.

"Yes, if you stay strong then you'll be able to become a great warrior and hunt the Nakujuk. But shouldn't we reassure your grandfather first?"

"Yes!"

Bona nodded excitedly and quickly hugged the embarrassed Guran.

"Come, let's get out of here."

"Yes, I'm ready."

Buksil finished with the magic projector and got out of his seat. However, Lariette was still looking at the skills window and couldn't hear Ark's voice. She had been a magician, but once she changed to Innocence Knight then all her magic was deleted and new skills registered. She was so preoccupied distributing the 50% stat points that she paid no attention to her surroundings. Ark knew the circumstances but couldn't wait for her.

"Lariette-nim?"

Ark approached Lariette who became surprised and jumped.

"Ah, Ark-nim."

"Have you still not finished redistributing your skills?"

"I took a bit of time checking every skill. But I've just finished."

Lariette smiled and replied.

Ark was speechless for a moment. He had been too busy fighting the boss to pay attention, but Lariette was really beautiful. Of course, all females in New World altered their appearance to become prettier. Roco had also altered her character to the point that she could be in a CF (commercial). But Ark knew. Unlike the other users, Lariette didn't have a big difference between reality and the game.....so other people might not understand, but Ark felt like her beauty was even more special.

'Are we really going to continue together in the future?'

Even though Ark had promised to let her accompany him, he hadn't realised he would feel this way. He had been caught up in completing the quest and beating the boss. However, Ark was still a healthy Korean man. It was impossible not to like going forward with a beautiful woman. No, it was what he had been dreaming of since he first saw her in Jackson. But when it became real like this, it was actually a burden. His heart felt on edge like it was being stabbed.

'That's strange, why do I feel like this around you?'

Although he questioned it, there was an obvious reason. However, 99% of his brain was occupied with making money so he couldn't work it out. Nevertheless, the world seemed extremely fair. If someone became too cunning then he would end up being excessively stupid.

'But I don't know how to treat Lariette-nim.'

Ark was worried about it since he was inexperienced with girls.

'Well I'll work it out somehow.'

Ark eventually gave up on finding an answer and turned towards her.

"That....what is your new profession like?"

"I'm not sure yet. Luckily it doesn't seem that different from Alan's Holy Knight. A lot of the skills I looked at seemed similar to a Holy Knight. Ah....."

Lariette covered her mouth and studied Ark's face.

Ark was confused by her attitude at first before shaking his head.

"You don't have to worry. My feelings against Alan have been settled."

It was true. Killing Alan last time was sufficient. He had gotten enough payback that it didn't really matter to him anymore. Although Alan might still hold a grudge against Ark.....No, there was a 100% chance but Ark had no emotions left about Alan.

Yes, after the business ended then Ark was an easy-going person who won't pay any regards to other people's grudges.

'Alan is also in prison. He won't be able to move even 1 muscle in the next month. And there will be a huge difference between us once he leaves. Huhuhu, it has ended perfectly. There is no reason to pay him any regard.'

Online games were an endless competition. No matter how high the level, someone else would catch up if the user was careless. This wasn't a one or two day difference, but a whole month spent in jail. But was that all? Although Ark was a fool in regards to women, he was about a 100 in regards to the game. Based on the conversation between Ronian and Lariette, there was a penalty applied to his profession of Holy Knight. One month of prison and a penalty to his profession! In conclusion, Alan had surely reached his end. Paying attention to that sort of guy was a useless waste of calories. However Lariette had no way of knowing what happened.

'I know that he received a lot of damage from Alan.....but it is wonderful that Ark-nim is able to shake off that grudge.'

Thus.....the misunderstandings just deepened. Lariette send him a subtle look of respect.

'What the? Why is she looking like that?'

Ark was confused about her expression.

"...That's right, I remember now! You were the girl always with Alan!"

Dedric shouted after staring at Lariette.

"Even if Master is fooled, my eyes won't be deceived. What the? Why are you trying to approach Master? You couldn't have approached Master for no reason. Obviously you've received orders from Alan!"

Clack clack? Clack clack clack!

Ssak ssak ssak ssak!

Razak and Radun both looked at her with wary eyes after those words. Lariette had no idea what to do after Ark's pets suddenly became cautious towards her. Then Dedric approached Ark and started cursing.

"Master, you didn't know? Look, it's the girl who was with that sissy! That beep-beep from the siege who used her -beep- magic!"

Ark was appalled and blocked Dedric's mouth. But his bad words had already been spoken and heard. Lariette became pale as this was the first time she heard such words. Guran, Bona and Buksil couldn't understand the situation and just observed with bemused expressions. Then Dedric who hadn't grasped the situation just pushed the hand back and continued talking.

"Pah, Master! Why won't you let me talk? Don't you understand? I said....."

"Please shut up and stay quiet, yes?"

Ark muttered with a murderous gaze. Just like usual, Dedric flinched and shut his mouth.

"I'm really sorry. For my pet to say such words....."

"Ah, it's nothing."

Lariette struggled to smile with a stiff face. Ark was silent for a moment before sighing.

"Hrmm, well let's return to the village in the valley for the moment."

"You don't have to explain. Because I'll just follow Ark-nim for the moment."

Thankfully, Dedric's rant hadn't changed her mind about accompanying him.

".....Ah, yes. Then let's go."

"Yes."

So Ark led the group and headed upstairs. However, the atmosphere was a bit tense unlike before. Needless to say, the atmosphere had gone down to -100 with Dedric's words.

'Damn, the atmosphere was so good and now because of this guy.....'

Ark glared at Dedric. Dedric was still unaware of what he did wrong as was wondering 'What mistake did I make?' Dedric's attitude worsened even more. But

he had keen senses and kept quiet after noticing Ark's mood. Then Buksil approached from the rear.

"Ark-nim, this scene might be worth more than I thought."

"What do you mean?"

"What am I talking about? The brave warrior who risked his life jumping into the enemy's hideout in order to rescue the kidnapped girlfriend! This scene isn't easy to produce intentionally."

What was he saying? Ark became uncomfortable at those words and bluntly said.

"My relationship with Lariette-nim isn't like that."

"Aye, it's completely obvious....."

"It's not like that."

"Huh? But....."

Buksil was still disbelieving. But after thinking for a moment, he seemed to firmly grasp the situation.

"Then Ark-nim and Lariette-nim don't often meet?"

"I've only met her once last year. And there were a few more times in New World."

"Aha, I see."

Buksil grinned and nodded.

"What are you saying?"

"Huhuhu, Ark-nim is surprisingly slow."

"What the?"

"Please watch this."

Buksil pulled out the magic projector and played a recorded scene. It was the fight scene between Ark and Tamura. Since he forgot about the filming while fighting, the footage looked fairly plausible. However, that wasn't the reason Buksil showed him the scene. Buksil stopped the scene on an image of Lariette and muttered quietly.

"Take a good look. Now do you see what I'm trying to say?"

"Am I meant to see something?"

"Ah, it's really frustrating. If you're this slow then it's rather pitiful."

"What? What did you say? Huh?"

Ark was still in his Dark Wolf form.

When the black furred wolf showed his fangs, Buksil freaked out and explained.

"Ah, no. This is what I've been trying to say. Look here. Ark-nim, please look at the way Lariette-nim's expression changes. Look at the feelings being expressed. I don't know how Ark-nim feels, but there is a 100% chance that Lariette has a good impression of you....."

Ark blocked Buksil's mouth with an astonished face. He had no idea of what would happen if Lariette heard those words in this atmosphere. Fortunately Guran, Bona and Lariette were 10 metres behind the two of them and couldn't hear their conversation. Ark sighed and glared at Buksil.

"Stop talking nonsense you idiot. There is no such possibility."

At the same time, Ark sneaked a glance at Lariette's image still showing on the magic projector. Lariette's silky hair flowing down her back.....feelings of worry as well as delight and surprise was expressed on her face, and it was all directed towards Ark. The obsidian like eyes never looked away from him. His face became hot as he noticed what Buksil was saying. At the same time, his heart was thumping in his chest.

'Perhaps Buksil's words are correct.....?'

Ark muttered before shaking his head.

"No. Lariette-nim.....it's definitely not like that. After being kidnapped to a place like this, it is natural to look at your rescuer like that. And you would feel anxious if the person who came to help you is in danger. Such reactions are normal....."

"Well of course it wouldn't be visible to you."

'What? This bastard!'

Ark frowned at Buksil's words.

Why was his attitude so irresponsible? But Buksil was uninterested and just scratched his head before muttering.

“In fact I don’t really care. The most important thing is the ‘atmosphere.’ Although Ark’s current form is good, it leaves a somewhat dreary impression. But the atmosphere changed after Lariette-nim decided to accompany you. Even if the two of you aren’t in a relationship, it’s fine as long as there’s a good impression between you. Like I said, I need a ‘plausible’ atmosphere.”

‘This cheeky bastard....!’

Ark became upset but he didn’t show it. Since somewhat unrelated spoke about the relationship between Ark and Lariette, wasn’t it natural to become upset? Furthermore, the video was very important to Ark. In fact, there was a reason Ark was actively cooperating with the filming.

“The battle against the Nakujuk to rescue the boy and the fight against the Draken in the rain! I got better shots than I thought I would. If I put this on the official site then it might enter the top 10.”

Buksil said in an excited voice just before they entered the Abyss of Despair.

“Official site?”

“Yes, the official site of Global Exos. The videos of the game on there are ranked every month. If it reaches the top 10 then it has at least 50,000 hits. It is only a matter of time until Ark-nim is a big star.”

Ark felt a lightbulb light up as he listened. It was unnecessary to say again, but Ark’s final goal was to join Global Exos. Although the exact acceptance criteria was unknown, it was clearly evident that he had to be better than other users.

‘If my video becomes popular on the site then it’ll help my entrance examination.’

Ark was currently in his Dark Wolf form. But Ark mistakenly thought that Global Exos was reading his reports and would know that Dark Wolf and Ark was the same. In other words, if the movie became popular then he would secretly appeal to Global Exos without other users knowing his identity.

‘This chance doesn’t come along every day. Now that I know the benefits of the video, it won’t be easy for me to send him away.’

Therefore, Ark changed his mind about sending Buksil away one he had an opportunity. Accompanying him to the destination should have a satisfactory result.

So instead of delaying the shoot, he cooperated with Buksil while filming. Come to think of it, Buksil seemed to have become a little cocky since then.

“Did you hear what I just said? Anyway, atmosphere is the most important thing. But Ark-nim doesn’t have to worry about that. I’ll make it so that both men and women have a good impression of you. I’ll take care of it through careful editing. Oh, and please don’t mention this to Lariette-nim. Because I’ll start filming secretly from now on.”

“What? Why?”

“Does Ark-nim want Lariette-nim to become a celebrity as well? If Lariette-nim becomes uncomfortable towards Ark-nim while filming then it’ll feel awkward. Furthermore, scripted films are common nowadays. These days the realistic videos are the ones that become popular. The magic projector is still not widely known. I’ll take the videos carefully so Ark-nim shouldn’t pay any attention to me.”

Buksil was surprisingly an expert in this area. According to Buksil’s words, the movie-like videos were extremely popular. But people soon tired of the same contents and now realistic videos were the trend. Well, even variety shows were the trend on TV.

‘In the end, Lariette-nim will have no idea so I’ll be acting the fool by myself?’

Ark looked uncomfortable as Buksil confirmed this.

“All this work is for Ark-nim. Making a cool video that will reach the top 10 isn’t an easy thing.”

“.....I understand, I’ll be careful.”

Ark sighed and nodded. Although he agreed without thinking, it had suddenly become much bigger. And now he had to conceal it from Lariette while they were filmed secretly. However, Buksil’s words made sense.

If he explained then the relationship between the two of them would feel even more awkward.

‘Yes, it’s not a bad thing.....and Lariette is also a candidate. It won’t be bad if both of us catches Global Exos attention with the videos. But can I do well?’

Ark turned and looked at Lariette. It was unnecessary to mention it again, but Ark had more than a crush on her. Every time he met her during the game. His heart trembled. But those sentiments weren’t feelings of love. It was similar to the feeling

that the general public felt when watching celebrities.....Ark had been thinking that all along. Lariette was very beautiful. If Buksil saw her in real life then he probably wouldn't be able to act so calmly. And her education was enough for her to have a job at Global Exos. Meanwhile Ark was struggling with medical bills and living expenses every month. It was the reason why he hesitated in her presence.

'Lariette-nim suits a guy like Alan.'

A bitter sigh emerged from Ark's mouth. In New World, Ark had removed Alan's position as the Lord. But in reality, Alan was still nobility while Ark was just a common person. And Lariette was a woman more suited for nobility than a general person. In fact, at this point Ark still believed that Lariette and Alan were dating. She was probably wandering around alone because Alan was in jail.

'Yes, I don't need to have complicated thoughts. The reason I have a crush on her is because she was the only one to reach out a hand to me when I was feeling nervous about the interview. That's it. Lariette-nim is probably kind to me for the same reason. Since meeting acquaintances inside the game is not that common. Of course, what other reason would there be?'

Ark had that thought and finally cleared his mind. Like it was mentioned earlier, Ark only used 1% of his brain on such worries. Since Buksil's words had made his head all complicated, Ark had been worrying about it too much. He had to quickly finish his <Rescue Bona> quest. He had to complete it to proceed with his <Genius Alchemist's Laboratory> quest. And there was also the Red Man who appeared after defeating Tamura. Although he couldn't pursue him, he needed to find out more information about why he was in the Netherworld. But that would be a problem for later. He had a more realistic problem to think about after exiting the Abyss of Despair. In order to complete the job, he had to return to the village in the valley. But all of Ark's skyrays had been wiped out by the Draken. Fortunately they could still walk back to the village. It was a straight path when flying through the sky, but navigating the complicated terrain would take a considerable amount of time.

"Guran, how long will it take to return to the village from here?"

"I don't completely know but it should take approximately 4 days."

He naturally sighed at Guran's words. 4 days was approximately 1 day in reality. But Ark just looked gloomy. He forgot for a while but this wasn't a situation where he could afford to waste time. Ark had wiped out Jewel's party who came to the Netherworld. It meant that Jewel would resurrect after 24 hours.

'If Jewel followed my path then they probably updated the resurrection place at the village. Then they would have resurrected before I reach the village.'

It was a serious issue. He was lucky before but Ark couldn't deal with Jewel, Duke and their group by himself. He wouldn't stand a chance if he encountered them in the field. No, he was unlikely to succeed and they probably wouldn't let him run away either.

'But there isn't another way to return to the village....'

He couldn't cram his 4 companions on Radun's back.

Kaaaaaaa-!

Then Ark suddenly heard familiar cries from above his head. He looked up and saw skyrays flying above him.

'Skyrays? Wait, the Myutal living in the Valley Village are the only monster trainers.'

Ark looked expectantly at Guran.

"Guran, can you tame those skyrays?"

"Monster taming is a special talent only a few Myutal have. Bona also has the talent. But taming a monster requires a lot of time. Even an experienced trainer would take one month to tame a monster. Even if Bona managed to train one, it would take some time to tame two."

Bona nodded at Guran's description.

'Damn it, I'll grow old before that monster will be tamed.'

"But it's strange. This area is the habitat of the Draken so normally the skyrays wouldn't approach.....eh? Wait, that is.....?"

Guran focused his attention and seemed to have found something.

"Indeed, these skyrays have already been trained."

"They've already been trained?"

"Yes, it is definitely hooked up to some reins. There are approximately 10 of them? Why are 10 trained skyrays here.....eh? Perhaps Teacher....."

The circumstances suddenly became clear in Ark's mind.

'That's right, Jewel's group arrived at the abyss shortly after I did. They must have taken 1 hour to reach the abyss from the village. Even if they knew my position

thanks to the curse, they wouldn't have been able to reach me so fast by foot. If that's the case?'

Jewel's group must have chased him using the skyrays.

'They must've stopped by the village while chasing me.'

Now the circumstances made a lot more sense. And a way to solve his problem emerged.

"If the skyrays have already been trained then perhaps they can take us?"

"It is possible but....the seal on the skyrays has loosened."

"Seal?"

"Yes, originally the monster and the trainer wouldn't be able to move a certain distance away from each other. That's because the dominance would weaken and they would return to the wild."

"Eh? But we came here riding the skyrays."

"That is the effect of the seal."

Guran rolled up his sleeves and demonstrated. There was a black pattern on his wrist. Before they left the village, Beseutyu had stamped the pattern on Ark's and Buksil's wrist.

"The person stamped with the pattern will be recognized as the monster trainer for a certain period of time. Therefore the effects of the dominance won't disappear if there is this seal. Now the people stamped are dead so the skyrays are in a state of confusion. It is impossible to tame them again....."

Then Bona interrupted.

"They haven't fully returned to their wild state yet. If we update the seal before they return to the wild state then it'll be fine."

"But the seal of the original owner.....ah, that's right!"

Guran tilted his head and shouted.

"That's right. If these skyrays are Teacher's then we can renew the seal. Because we have one if Teacher's seals. Of course we need to update every person's stamps, but

it shouldn't be hard for Bona since he has the makings of a trainer. The problem is how we can catch the confused skyrays....."

Guran muttered in a small voice while staring at the skyrays flying above. The rest of this situation was up to Ark.

"I'll take care of it. Dedric, it's your turn."

Ark ventured forward with a smile. The skyrays were flying dozens of metres above him but it wasn't a problem with Dedric. However.....no answer was heard. Dedric was looking at the distant mountains and couldn't seem to hear anything.

"Hey you, what are you doing? Can't you hear me?"

There was no reply.....

Dedric yawned and scratched his neck.

'This guy, is it because I beat him earlier?'

Ark's eyes sharpened. It appeared that he had to train his pets first before the skyrays. However, one or two beatings wouldn't work when Dedric was rebelling so openly. His ego was so strong that beating him wouldn't fix the habit. Dedric had to be in a critical condition three or four times before paying attention. But now there were too many eyes watching. Not only was Lariette watching, but doing violence in front of Bona might make him lose respect for Ark.....In addition, there was no time to waste on beating him so much.

'Damn, this guy must be aware of the urgency in this matter.'

Ark glared at Dedric.

'Wait? Wasn't his bad mood because Razak succeeded in the evolution? Then.....'

What should he do.....Ark concentrated for a bit before he smiled and said.

"This time I've gathered so many ingredients that I'll probably be able to make at least 10 new dishes. Unfortunately it's not possible anymore."

".....?"

Dedric tilted his head in confusion. Normally he would beat them until they ate new food but now he said it wasn't possible?

"Aren't most of the ingredients gathered good for the body? Well, at least 70% of them will have a good effect. But I can't force you if you don't want to. I'll just feed all of it to Razak. I will probably continue like that in the future.....but then wouldn't Razak become even stronger?"

Then Dedric pricked his ears and began to look around.

"What, what the? It will also be like that in the future?"

"Yes, I've changed my policy. After thinking about it, I realised that I've been acting terribly. I've reflected deeply. If you don't want to eat food in the future then I won't force you. I'll only feed Razak who wants to become stronger."

"It's a different story!"

"Why is it different? It's what you always wanted."

"It is, but....."

Dedric stuttered with embarrassment. He certainly didn't want to eat disgusting new dishes. But not eating at all was a problem. Since Razak stats increased after going through his second evolution, wouldn't the difference become even bigger if only Razak ate the food? His position might even fall beneath Radun and Razak. No, it was almost certain. Then wouldn't it go back to the days when he was bullied as a bat? Ark smiled like a wicked adult while watching Dedric shake his head.

'Huhuhu, he really is childish.'

Ark actually learned this approach from his mother. As a child, Ark never took his medicine even when he had a high fever. He was so stubborn that his mother couldn't force him. His mother abandoned it half-way and used a trick.

"If you don't eat this then there is no possibility of becoming an adult.....no chance. I'll just give it to the children next door. The children next door will grow rapidly while Hyun-woo will stay as a little kid. When the neighbourhood kids are playing at school, Hyun-woo will be playing by himself. Ah, our Hyun-woo is so pitiful."

Then his mother burst into tears and Ark took the medicine. It was a bitter pill. Ark was also aware of this. That's why he decided not to eat even if he died. But there was a movie that said loneliness was the hardest thing for a child. Since then Ark was a good child who took his medicine. He hated it, but he wanted to become a man.....

Anyway, Dedric wasn't that different from when Ark was 4 years old. He didn't like eating new dishes. But if he was ignored and everything given to Razak then he would become lonely. Then just like his mother, Ark approached Dedric and whispered in a gentle voice.

"I'm only saying it now, but don't you think its better that Razak evolved first?"

".....Huh?"

"Think about it. Who do you think had really been useful so far?"

".....Who?"

"You frustrating guy, of course it is you. In fact, I actually regard you as the number 2. That is why you're punished when there is a problem. It is standard for the boss to punish the upper rank as a demonstration to the subordinates. Then the rest would also follow. Why you ask? In their hearts, Radun and Razak also think of you as number 2."

".....Really?"

"Of course. That is why only you can such crude language."

Was it really like that? No, Radun and Razak simply couldn't talk.

"Anyway, you evolved first so you're higher up in the hierarchy. Since you evolved first you were even more helpful in battle. Do you understand? If you don't help this time then it won't be possible to catch the skyrays. Razak is no use even though he evolved. I couldn't give up the opportunity for Razak to evolve but I didn't really feel like it."

Ark shook his head in regret.

"So I wanted to make you even stronger than Razak by feeding you new dishes.....but I can't help it if you don't want to. You can just give up your number 2 spot to Razak. I'll also only give food to Razak from now on. How about it?"

"Who said I didn't like it?"

Dedric shouted loudly. Then Ark silenced Dedric and whispered in a low voice.

"Shh, please speak quietly. Radun or Razak can't hear this."

"Why?"

"You fool, those guys don't realize that I've been treating you in a special manner."

"Special?"

"Yes, special."

Ark enunciated it clearly. Then Dedric smirked and laughed.

"If Master says so.....okay, Razak is useless even though he evolved right? Huhuhu, of course it is like that. It is a skeleton that evolved. It is incomparable to a noble vampire. I didn't know that Master was aware of it. Huhuhuhu, as the number 2 I'm supposed to show an example to the lower ones. Will you give me a new dish from now on?"

"Of course. You are special."

"Okay, should I lure those guys towards Master?"

"As expected, I can only rely on you. I don't have to explain it."

"I'm not number 2 for nothing."

Ark was laughing when a message window appeared.

Your pet 'Dedric' is looking at you with more respectful eyes.

<The loyalty of your summon has increased by 10>

The effect was immediate. Dedric behaved himself and flew up at an incredible pace.

"Hahaha, I am the number 2! Take this!"

Dedric narrowed the distance and quickly approached the skyray. And boldly.....after digging his fingers into his nose, he flicked it at their face. He fiercely used his 'Taunt' skill. The skyray instantly rushed towards Dedric with angry cries. However, the opponent was Dedric who was in extremely good spirits! Dedric avoided the attack and led the skyray towards Ark.

"Master, the number 2 guy has attracted a skyray!"

"You're indeed the best! Razak, transform!"

Razak's body transformed into a sword like a robot. The blade that Razak changed into also had a different appearance. There were some vertebrae sprouting from both

sides and a black aura covered the blade. Ark picked up the saw blade, changed it into a whip and threw it towards the sky.

Chwararak!

Thanks to the evolution, the whip became 5 metres longer and shot into the sky. Even though Razak evolved into the saw blade, he was still conscious. It was the reason why Ark could use the whip to wind around things even when he didn't know how to use the whip. Razak knew Ark's intent and aimed towards the skyray before winding tightly around it.

Kaaaaaaa-!

The skyray shrieked and twisted its body.

"Now. Please help!"

"Yes!"

When Ark called out Guran, Bona, Buksil and Lariette who had been idly watching rushed forward and helped pull. However they were facing a flying monster. It wasn't easily taken down even with 5 people.

"We shouldn't just blindly pull. When it tires from struggling then we'll quickly pull. Please control the pace according to my commands. Release.....pull!"

"Heave-ho, heave-ho, heave-ho!"

5 people tugged on the saw blade.

"This bastard, where are you looking? A skyray dares defy me? I am the number 2 summon!"

Dedric also helped by stepping on the skyray from above. After a few minutes.....the skyray became exhausted and was dragged down. Using Dedric as bait was a great success.

"Huk, huk, huk, be good now. Bona, it's your turn. Please change the stamped pattern."

"Yes."

Bona said while gasping. He brought Ark's wrist with the pattern close to the skyray and chanted a spell with his eyes closed. After a while, a message window floated in front of Ark.

-The trainer's seal has been successfully renewed.

The skyray will continue to follow Ark for the duration of the effects of the sealing.

<Remaining Time: 2 hours>

"Okay, we can't take a break!"

Ark grabbed the reins and got on the skyray. The now docile skyray flew obediently into the sky.

"Dedric, lead the skyray to me coolly just like before!"

"Was I cool? Hehehe, okay. Master!"

He danced like a fool from the praise. Dedric felt good and shot across the sky like an arrow. Then he led them towards Ark who immediately wrapped his blade around them and drew the skyray to the ground. It wasn't easy for 5 people pulling, but it wasn't a problem if Ark utilizing the tame skyray. So Ark immediately caught all ten skyrays. Only 3 people were stamped so the skyrays could only follow their commands.

"Hehehe, how was it Master?"

Dedric strutted forward and said after capturing the skyrays ended.

"Yes, as expected from the number 2. I'll feed you new dishes until your stats climb higher than Razak's. You have the appropriate qualifications."

"Really? You promise?"

Dedric confirmed a few times. He was truly deceived. If a monkey was fed 4 times in the morning, he would be upset when only fed 3 times in the evening. But if he fed the monkey 3 in the morning then he would be satisfied with 4 in the evening.

"Somehow this seems not right....."

Dedric was more intelligent than a monkey so he was a little cautious. But when Ark mentioned the number 2 position and flattered him again, Dedric immediately forgot and laughed again.

He was indeed simple.....it was really pitiful.

"Ark-nim, I've finished updating all the seals."

Guran approached after he finished stamping.

"Then let's leave quickly."

Ark and his companions walked towards the 10 skyrays. Guran and Bona were familiar with them and got on their backs. Buksil had suffered through the skyray dying during the storm and hesitated, but he eventually got on. But Lariette just stopped a small distance away.

"What's wrong?"

"No.....are we flying in the air on these creatures?"

Lariette shuddered and shook her head.

"I, I'm.....because I'm not familiar with this.....no, flying in the sky....."

"It isn't very risky."

Ark murmured to try and calm Lariette down.

"It's not that.....I.....this might be bad.....I'm a bit afraid of heights....."

Surprise showed in Ark's expression. The skyrays were trained to obediently follow commands. Buksil was a merchant who would often travel long distances and had the riding skill. Ark also had the riding skill and was used to travelling on Radunma. It was possible even without the riding skill, but asking someone afraid of heights to fly on a skyray was definitely impossible. Then Guran shrugged and made a suggestion.

"It is okay. Lariette will just have to travel with someone since she's afraid. There are 10 skyrays so we can't afford to change when it gets tired. But as you can see, Bona is not yet familiar with the skyrays....."

Bona was seated in front of Guran. Ark looked at Buksil who pretended to stare at the distant mountains. Buksil didn't want to travel with someone afraid of heights. Ark scratched his head before shrugging.

"Then please get on behind me."

"....."

Lariette hesitated for a moment. However, she had no choice. Eventually she grabbed Ark's hand and got on the skyray. And just like a girl riding on her

boyfriend's motorbike for the first time, Lariette grasped the edge of his shirt with a red face.

"Now, let's go! Guran, please guide us."

"Yes, hiyah!"

Guran grabbed the reins and ordered the skyrays into the sky. It rose in an almost vertical line!

"Kyaaak!"

Lariette screamed and hugged Ark tightly. Ark was so shocked that he almost dropped the reins.

"Lariette-nim?"

Ark burst out in embarrassment but Lariette was already in a state of panic. All she could do was bury her head and scream. Meanwhile Buksil was filming the whole thing. He flew sideways holding the magic projector and made the OK sign with his fingers. But Ark was also falling into a panic.

'If I laugh then I won't be able to stop.'

Lariette had switched to a knight but she was still wearing a robe. Her soft touch and warm body temperature was clearly transmitted to him. Apart from his mother and Roco, Ark still had 0% resistance against women. Ark's brain became paralyzed from the situation. Meanwhile the skyray was flying through the Netherworld's spinning sky. Ark's head was also spinning.

"I'm a little bit uneasy....."

Dedric was following behind him while still being confused.

Act 3: Lee Myung-ryong's Humiliation

"What on earth did you do?"

A grey haired middle aged person asked with a sharp glance. He was the section chief of the Police Agency's SWAT forces, Cho Young-hwan.

"Nothing much."

The person replied in a curt voice. Bad dress, bad posture, bad attitude.....the man was the captain of the number 1 SWAT team, the number 1 hooligan known as Lee Myung-ryong. Cho Young-hwan shot Lee Myung-ryong an annoyed look and said.

“Are you really going to act like this?”

“What do you mean?”

“I don’t know the circumstances but did you bark at someone at the top?”

“Barking wouldn’t change anything.”

Cho Young-hwan approached the desk.

“.....That is why this situation happened.”

“I never denied that. I just didn’t want to say it.”

“Hey, Lee Myung-ryong.”

Cho Young-hwan pressed a finger to his temple and rebuked him.

“Don’t I know you? Don’t you know me?”

“We’ve gone to the public baths together so of course I know you.”

“Don’t joke around. But yes, there are many members of the Police Agency who knows all the scars on my body. It is a part of our lives. In the field, one mistake can mean being unable to dodge a bullet or having a sashimi knife stabbed in your back. And everybody in the police force is prepared for that.”

“You should’ve gone to the National Assembly. You would gather all of the police’s votes.”

“Don’t joke around!”

Cho Young-hwan struck the desk with his fists. The fists which hit the desk were covered in scars. Although he was now sitting at a desk, a few years ago he was also a member of the SWAT team. The Bear of the National Police Agency. It was the nickname the delinquents gave to Cho Young-hwan.

“I’m a public servant. Wearing wound dressings is useless. But it’s done. Someone at the top aimed a bullet at me and it hit.”

Lee Myung-ryong replied coldly.

"Hwa-rang sunbaenim also exited the Police Department with a limp."

"You really!"

Cho Young-hwan jumped and blushed. Lee Myung-ryong noticed this and glared while muttering.

"I don't need to complain to section chief. Don't you know? It is an amazingly accurate hit to be random. No, it is like they're trying to make it look accidental.

"....."

Cho Young-hwan was silent for a moment before pulling out a cigarette. Before the smoke reached Lee Myung-ryong, the cigarette butt was pressed into the pile of butts on the ashtray. Cho Young-hwan took a deep breath and inhaled the smoke into his lungs.

"I know how you feel.....but there are quite a few people you've offended.

"Offended? Yes, I am furious."

Lee Myung-Ryong gave a cynical smile and nodded. Yes, fury was building up in his throat even though he was laughing. He wanted to search for the criminal but he was quite cynical.....An incident took place this morning. He had exited the gym after finishing his usual workout. All of a sudden he was summoned to the section chief's office and told that he would be joining the Special Crimes Countermeasures unit.

'That asshole....!'

Lee Myung-ryong had a quick mind. No, he wasn't smart in the conventional sense. He had entered the police force thanks to his history as a national taekwondo representative. He had barely passed the test to enter. But he had a keen sense of smell about shady dealings. Special crimes countermeasures.....

It was the name of the department which dealt with violent crime. However, it wasn't the 'investigation' but 'measures' unit. That meant gathering information at a desk about the criminals before they committed an incident. And then handed over the clues to the investigation department. It was a paid position which required little work. The normal workers would've graduated from college, but to have a SWAT team member join it.....yet the announcement was that Lee Myung-ryong would join that department. However, Lee Myung-ryong immediately understood the situation when the section chief explained it. No, he had actually been expecting it for several days.

Lee Kyung-Ho. Not long ago, he went to Hyun-woo to visit Andel's father. He used to be a part of the prosecution office and was extremely close to the chief of the police force. And Lee Myung-ryong happened to not get along with the police chief. He had confrontations with the police chief after Gwon Hwa-rang was forced to retire. Therefore Lee Myung-ryong was an eyesore to the Chief of the National Police Agency. But since Lee Myung-ryong had good results, he couldn't openly punish him. So Lee Kyung-Ho used his police connections to help smooth the way. This situation was rigged by those two people. It was obviously the wishes of those two humans. They wanted Lee Myung-ryong to either become angry and disobey or resign.

'Those civil servants.....I would love to beat him up.....'

Lee Myung-ryong definitely wanted to go to Lee Kyung-Ho and throw his letter of resignation in his face. Since he knew all the circumstances, Lee Myung-ryong wasn't just going to follow their plan. If Lee Myung-ryong left then Hyun-woo would definitely notice.

'That guy calms me down pretty quickly.'

He smiled while thinking about Hyun-woo. He felt a sense of pride. He was a teacher after all. He didn't want to involve his disciple in this kind of dirty situation.

"Dammit, it's impossible. That bastard.....is the police force his playground? You must know something since you're not arguing about it."

Cho Young-hwan smoked his cigarette with annoyance.

"Anyway, that's it. Don't write the resignation letter immediately. I'll wait and observe the situation a little bit more. Please think of it as a couple of months holiday. I'll look for something in the meantime."

"Yes."

"I've contacted the section chief there. That fellow will find you a suitable position. He's a friend so he'll look after you. You can go now."

"Yes, I'll return if possible."

Lee Myung-ryong replied and left the section chief's office.

He talked roughly but it seemed like Cho Young-hwan had been truly worried that Lee Myung-ryong would resign. So he contacted the Special Crimes Countermeasures department beforehand to organize a position.

"A desk job.....I don't know how long I can endure it."

Lee Myung-ryong sighed and slowly headed towards the Special Crimes Countermeasures department. At this point, Lee Myung-ryong never imagined the work that he would be undergoing.

"Ah, you're the one Section Chief Cho mentioned." I'm Choi Deok-pil and I'm in charge here."

Someone approached him as he entered the Special Crimes Countermeasures department. He had the appearance of a typical white-collar employee.

"Yes, I'm Lee Myung-ryong."

"Hahahah, no need to be so formal here. I understand that this announcement must've been very unpleasant for you. But after seeing Section Chief Cho's reactions, you shouldn't be here that long. Well, I hope we bond as a family while you're here."

"What do I need to do? Copy? Coffee errands?"

"Hmm, I think I can put a SWAT team member to better use. Just as well. A position recently became available and I was worried about it. It might suit you. Come one."

Choi Deok-pil led him to a small corner office. Even though it was called an office, there were none of the usual machines. There was just a big circular capsule.

"What's this? A newly excavated dinosaur egg?"

"Is this the first time you've seen it?"

"Yes, I'm not interested in archaeology."

Choi Deok-pil looked at him before letting out a burst of laughter.

"This machine is a game unit. It is a computer designed to connect to a virtual reality game. This unit is dedicated towards the game called New World."

"New world?"

Lee Myung-ryong's eyes widened.

"Don't tell me you haven't heard of it?"

"No, I've heard of New World."

"I'm glad. You almost seemed like a caveman just then."

Choi Deok-pil nodded his head. But Lee Myung-ryong had no interest in the middle aged Choi Deok-pil. He was curious about the unit after listening to Hyun-woo's words and asked in an inquisitive voice.

"But what does this have to do with the police force?"

"You don't seem to understand yet. These days it isn't very rare to investigate online games. And it increases the department's results."

Choi Deok-pil gave a brief explanation. Those who commit a crime tend to have an excessive amount of free time. Since they can't carelessly wander around, they're forced to stay in a dimly lit room all day. It is surprisingly hard to endure. Sometimes the criminals even become depressed from hiding and surrender themselves to the police. A virtual reality game is a good way for a criminal to escape their lives. They don't have to risk themselves going outside and they can wander around a different world.

"Most of those guys are satisfied living through virtual reality games. They even have a guild in the game.....ah, meetings as well. Those guys even have regular meetings where the exchange criminal information and laugh. In that case, findings clues for the meeting is not that hard."

That's because police personnel were also sent into the game. These investigation methods had been started 10 years ago and were getting satisfactory results.

"Then this unit is.....?"

"Yes after the commercialization of New World, we've received information that those fellows have flocked towards that game. So a few months ago, we requested support from Global Exos and received a few test models. This is one of those."

Now he knew why there was a unit in the police agency. But there was still a part which didn't make sense.

"As far as I know, I heard that you need to create a user ID to access the game. And the ID must list the social security number and personal information..... If so, couldn't you simply request the information from the company?"

"Ah my friend, we can but it is not that simple."

Choi Deok-pil shook his head like he had a headache.

"You said that they must enter personal information to create an ID. But that's in the old days, now they create an ID using retina scans. Personal information is more hidden than ever. So it has become much more challenging. But that is exactly the problem."

"That's the problem?"

"Don't you know? Ever since companies have changed security measures to body data a few years ago, the human rights laws have made it incredible difficult to access that data. Currently, the privacy-related data that is stored in the black boxes can't be accessed unless it is related to terrorism at a national level. So the police has to work even harder to get that information."

Choi Deok-pil scratched his head. His mind became complicated just thinking about it.

"But what will I be doing?"

"That's simple. It shouldn't be that different from actual investigation. Just look for the suspects or the guild based on the information that we give you. Once you've found the suspect then please approach and discover as much information as possible. Their address, telephone number, information about the incident..... The game also has the ability to videotape such information. Once you record such information then the rest of the team will take care of it."

"You want me to investigate in New World?"

"That's right.....isn't that what we do?"

"But I only know how to beat people up."

"That's the reason why you're suitable."

"Yes?" Lee Myung-ryong was bewildered and Choi Deok-pil explained with a grin.

"In fact, I've never tried it out so I don't know. According to your predecessor, New World is different from traditional virtual games. The game is said to be not that different from reality."

"Isn't it still a virtual reality game?"

"That's right. But New World has a different meaning. The user can utilize their previous knowledge and experience. It isn't 100% of course, but the person with a developed physical ability will be more advantageous. That's why you were

recommended. Although you'll only have a little bit of time to learn the game, your physical abilities have been developed over many years."

"What are you saying.....?"

"Like I said I don't know. It is something your predecessor said. So just learn the game step by step and identify the suspect. Since we can't check their personal information, you won't know who is a suspect inside the game.

Choi Deok-pil handed him a thick stack and papers and continued.

"The problem is that all these people have been in the game for a long time and having a considerably high level. With the level difference in online games, even you would have a hard time if you met them. Your predecessor lived in the game for two months and didn't spot even 1 suspect. So we thought of you who is a member of the SWAT team."

Choi Deok-pil took a deep breath and tapped Lee Myung-ryong's shoulder.

"However, we want you to play the game casually since investigations inside the game are a supplementary method. For now just casually get used to the game."

"Hrmmm....."

Lee Myung-ryong rubbed his chin and looked at the unit. Choi Deok-pil wore a subtle smile and asked.

"How is it? Will you try?"

"Well, it is better than fetching coffee."

Choi Deok-pil nodded and tapped his shoulder.

"I thought so. The first time isn't that difficult. Because your predecessor raised the character to level 150. The money earned is also quite high. Your predecessor even shed tears when he was forced to go to another game. The porridge has been cooked and given to you. The other employees have more things to do so I've been quite impatient. Frankly, this is a special employment."

"Huh?"

Lee Myung-ryong's expression showed that he didn't understand.

"Didn't this game use raw data? But how can I inherit a character that someone else raised?"

"Yes, that is usually the case."

Choi Deok-pil nodded.

"But like I said earlier, this is a Global Exos test unit. It is used by maintenance staff who check the system, so it is designed to connect with a common username and password. The username and password is written on this piece of paper."

Choi Deok-pil handed him several more pieces of paper and left the office. Lee Myung-ryong and the unit were the only things left in the office. Lee Myung-ryong crossed his arms and stared at the unit.

"You're the controller for New World?"

The work that he had to do felt strange. New World.....Hyun-woo had raised his curiosity so he tried to play it once. However, he was also called back whenever he tried to enter the game room. He never thought that he would end up playing the game like this.

"Well, okay. It isn't bad for a holiday."

Lee Myung-ryong finally entered the unit. He emerged in a small town filled with users.

"Oh, is this really the game?"

The man looked around curiously. It was a small town, with houses scattered around and a few people visible. The scenery was also different. It was a quiet mountain village surrounded by forest. It was a place for users to rest while travelling around New World. But the commonplace landscape seemed entirely new to the man.

'This is a virtual reality game? The earth, wind, and smell.....everything feels real.'

His worn clothes and heavy bag proved that he wasn't a novice in New World. However, he acted like he was accessing the virtual reality for the first time in the way he touched everything and moved his limbs. Yes, it was Lee Myung-ryong who logged in from the police department's unit. The documents he received included the variety of materials left behind by his predecessor. But looking through documents was not his style. Wouldn't a person who tried soybean paste understand it better than having it explained to them? Therefore Lee Myung-ryong shoved the documents into a corner before accessing New World. Lee-Myung-ryong's reaction when logging into the game was similar to a normal person. Most novice users would marvel at the amazing technology of New World. Even with a

dozen years of training his keen sense to the limit, he was still unable to distinguish the difference between reality and the game.

‘Huh.....Hyun-woo really wasn’t joking when he was talking about the game. How did they manage something like this? I’m freely moving my limbs so am I really sitting in the unit?’

Lee Myung-ryong froze for a moment. He had entered the game but he didn’t know what to do. Then, a semi-transparent object flickered in the corner of his eyes. Character information window, bags, etc.....it was the icon to view the related information. In fact, most users set these icons as ‘hidden’ in order to maximize the realism and used commands to open them. However, Lee Myung-ryong’s predecessor set the icons for him. Luckily Lee Myung-ryong knew these icons even if he was an idiot with games.

‘I have to know what type of guy I am. This is?’

Lee Myung-ryong touched the icon of a person with his fingers. The character information window showing various numerical values opened. Usually the information of a user who first started the game was simple. However, Lee Myung-ryong’s character was level 150. The various additions and changes in the meantime had made the information window complicated. The only things he learnt was his name ‘Isyuram’ and that he was level 150.

“Isyuram.....the name is not bad. It somehow seems strong.”

Although strength, agility and stamina were all common stats in RPGs, they were simply numbers to Lee Myung-ryong. He didn’t know what was high or low.

‘Sheesh, I don’t know what any of this means. I’ll slowly examine it later.....’

Lee Myung-ryong clicked on the icon shaped like a bag. This time the bags opened and a huge number of items were shown. He also saw that he had 800 gold. Although the bags were filled with all kinds of items, he didn’t know what they were used for or why he had them.

‘800 gold? Is this a lot? But what are all these things? Bunch of Rapana leaves? Unicorn horns? Pearl sand? Why the hell am I carrying around things like these?’

Other users would’ve drooled if they saw the bag full of expensive items. But Lee Myung-ryong didn’t know the value of goods in New World and just saw it as trash.

‘Oh, I don’t know. Let’s do something. According to Hyun-woo, you can catch monsters in New World. Will it be similar to a real battle? Okay, first let’s look for a monster. But where can I go to find a monster? I just ask someone.’

Lee Myung-ryong.....no, Isyuram closed the window. And then he roamed around the village for someone with information. Then he saw an old man at the entrance of the village grabbing several people.

“You really can’t?”

“.....I’m sorry.”

“It should be quite quick with everybody’s skill.”

The old man begged with a pleading look in his eye. However, the people wearing leather and holding a sword shook their heads.

“We’re aware of that.”

“We’ve often fought that monster when we came here.”

“We’d love to help you if we have enough time.....”

“But we’ve been hastily summoned by the guild.”

“We’ll help you next time we drop by.”

“Hey, we have to hurry.” We’ll be late for the summons.”

“Okay, let’s leave.”

The warriors hastily left the village.

“Ah, even though they were the first warriors I met after several weeks....”

The old man muttered in a desperate voice.

At that time, Isyuram who had been watching the situation approached the old man.

“Did you mention a monster?”

“Huh? You look familiar but who are you?”

“Oh, I’m Lee Myung-ryong.....no, Asura. No, Isyuram? No, wait a minute.”

Isyuram still hadn't adapted to the game and opened the information window again.

"Oh, yes I am Isyuram. I heard you mention something.....there is a monster?"

The old man was confused about the names and just stared at Isyuram. But he just sighed and then nodded.

"I'm tired of those monsters. They came here several weeks ago and started threatening us and hunting our herds. Therefore it is dealing considerable damage to the village. But as you can see, not many adventurers come to this mountain village. Those were the first warriors I saw in a while and asked them to exterminate the monster. But as you saw, they were too busy and refused to talk to me. Now I don't know what to do....."

"Then this game really has monsters?"

"Are you making fun of me?"

The old man stared at Isyuram strangely.

"Shouldn't you be experienced with monsters?"

"Anyway, there really is a monster?"

"Uh huh, but will you be enough? Yes, it's a monster. So what do you want?"

Annoyance showed in the old man's eyes. However, Isyuram ignored it and spoke quickly.

"Since this is a game then shouldn't I deal with it for you?"

"What?"

The old man looked Isyuram up and down. And then he asked incredulously.

"Were you serious just now?"

"Why wouldn't I be?"

"Ah, no.....I honestly would love any help just now.....if you get rid of the monsters then I'll be grateful....ah, right. Do you have any colleagues with you?"

"No, I don't need any."

"Eh? There is no one?"

“Just leave it to me. Where is it?”

“That hill over there is where they first appeared. If you dispose of 50 then I’ll be grateful.....”

A message window appeared in front of Isyuram after the old man finished speaking.

Gnoll extermination (Repeatable Quest)

You’ve met the old man in the unknown town who is in a predicament.

A group of monsters has appeared and is threatening the safety of the village. If you kill 50 gnolls and collect their tokens then the old man will compensate you. But you shouldn’t expect a great reward since it is a small village. You can expect warm food, a bed and some silver.

<Difficulty level: D>

Would you like to accept the quest?

‘Oh, so this is a quest. It’s similar to the complaints that the police receive. Then the old man is not a real person. A NPC? He is created really well.’

Isyuram paid close attention to the old man. The old man looked at Isyuram suspiciously and his body trembled.

“W-why are you looking at me like that? I-I have a wife and a child. Such a strange hobby.....”

“It’s nothing. Then I’ll be going!”

“Eh? Hey, wait a minute!”

When Isyuram turned around, the old man was surprised and immediately shouted. However, Isyuram had already shot out of the town.

‘Huhuhu, I know enough. Hyun-woo has already told me how to complete a quest. Now, where are those monsters?’

Isyuram had often heard about New World through Hyun-woo. While he didn’t know everything, Isyuram understood enough. More realistic battles than reality! In addition, the practical techniques in reality can be applied as skills in the game. Hyun-woo was not the only one. Some of the members in his SWAT team also

played New World. When they gathered, they exchanged information about how actual fighting techniques could be applied to New World. Even though he heard those information, Isyuram hadn't felt the attraction of New World yet. He possessed the old fashioned way of thinking that 'the game=for children.' Why would he want to fight with a character created by the computer? Even if it was realistic, it couldn't actually compare to real life. However, Isyuram underwent a 180 degree change once he was actually in New World.

'The old man was just like a real person!'

After seeing the environment and the NPC's, he was looking forward to the battles! Since it was a game, wouldn't the levels of the fights also increase?

'Hmm, okay. There is nothing different about moving my body. No, it feels even better than reality. In this condition I shouldn't have any problems killing the opponent. Huhuhu, I don't have to stress about it. What kind of standards are the monsters in New World?'

Isyuram smirked and quickly climbed the hill.

"Kyaaaaak, a human!"

"Grrrrrr, he came up here alone to die."

"Then I'll kill him!"

"Kikikik, let's eat the fresh meat to our heart's content."

Ugly voices were soon heard from the hill. The ugly voices continued as they stepped through the forest. Their faces resembled a huge dog while their mouths were filled with sharp fangs. Their appearance would be frightening if this was a dream. Normally people's hearts would jump if it was the first time they saw such monsters. However, Isyuram just slightly raised his eyebrows.

"Oho, this is a monster? A dog.....these guys are actually quite shocking to see. They would look good served with boiled soup and soju.... It is possible to eat real food in New World, so can I possibly eat them?"

An unimaginable response! There weren't many users who would look at a groll and think of dog soup. Instead of Isyuram flinching, the gnolls ended up jumping instead.

"Grrrrrrr. What the? What is this guy?"

"This guy.....is he actually a tremendous warrior?"

"Grrrrr, no look at him....that is....."

"Isn't it? Isn't it?"

While they were busy talking, Isyuram rushed up to them.

"Okay, shall we begin?"

Isyuram said as a gnoll raised its arm. It was definitely a very threatening attack. But who was he? He was a former member of the national taekwondo team and the captain of the number 1 SWAT team, someone who fought against gangsters and criminals every day. He was the owner of a steel heart who wouldn't blink an eye at that attack in reality. So Isyuram was convinced of his victory.

'Those guys at the village earlier said that it wasn't very hard. So these monsters are very weak.'

The warriors who had rejected the old man's request seemed like children to him. With Isyuram's eyes, he was able to grasp if someone was strong or not. Even though it was in a game, their posture and gait wasn't too different from reality. So he could sense their strength using such aspects.

'If these monsters are easy for them than the difficulty is clear. These are my first enemies but aren't they too weak? Well, when I return to the old man then I'll search out stronger opponents.'

Figuring out the pattern of attack was so easy that Isyuram yawned.

Kuaaaak!

It approached closely and swung the axe.

'Kukuku, this dog head tried such a simple attack.'

Isyuram laughed and quickly used some footwork to dodge the attack. Then he closed the gap to the enemy and.....wuduk!

'Eh? Wuduk?'

Isyuram's body suddenly stopped in the middle of his counterattack. Then his ankle collapsed and he tilted sideways. An information window then appeared in front of him.

Your action has gone beyond the limits of your strength and agility and sprained your ankle!

<For 30 minutes, your speed and reaction rate -30%>

It was a truly ridiculous information window.

“Eh? Ankle sprain? Ouch!”

What did it mean? Isyuram was able to run wearing a lead bag but now his ankle sprained from this little movement?

But he didn’t have time to be amazed. There was a red gauge visible on the lower left corner. But that was not the problem. Just like the message window said, his movement became incredibly slow. Although he could move 10 metres in his mind, he wasn’t even capable of moving 1 metre. In the end, Isyuram had to roll onto the ground to avoid the subsequent attacks.

“Dammit, why did my ankle sprain all of a sudden? Is it because I didn’t warm up before the fight?”

The same physical state in reality was also applied to New World.....that was what he thought, but Isyuram was still ignorant of the problem. And there was no room to worry.

“Huh, look at the ankle. My ankle sprained going against such insignificant dogs!”

If his movement was slowed then it would be better not to move. Isyuram took a light step and relaxed the muscles in his body. Then a gnoll rushed forward and swung a club. Isyuram rocked his body, avoided the attack and then transferred the power into a counterattack.

Bakak-!

There was a loud sound as flash and bone collided. The allocation of power, timing, posture.....everything was perfect for a counterattack.

‘All right, it is perfect this time! Huhuhu, that is stunning!’

Isyuram had a look of satisfaction on his face.

Grrrrrrr!

Isyuram's fist quickly took down a 2 metre tall figure! A blow to the temple turned the dog's head 90 degrees.

You have no knowledge of Hand-to-Hand Combat so the unreasonable attack has broken your wrist!

<100 damage, for 30 minutes your attack power and attack speed is -50%>

You have no knowledge of Hand-to-Hand Combat and the movement has caused your spinal discs have slipped!

<100 damage, for 30 minutes your upper spinal disk movement is restricted>

"Huk, what, what the hell is this....!"

Isyuram couldn't understand what was going on. It was also the same afterwards. Even with an ankle sprain, broken wrist and restricted spinal movements, Isyuram's fighting spirit burned until the end. But after 13 more fractures, he became dog food within 2 minutes.

"What the hell is going on?"

After a while, Isyuram revived at the town's quartermaster.

"Tsk tsk tsk, as expected."

The old man standing at the entrance to the village clicked his tongue and muttered. Isyuram became very embarrassed and tried to explain.

"Old man, this time was a mistake."

"You failed and now you want to try again? If you're an experienced adventurer then you wouldn't have any trouble with an opponent like that. As an adventurer you must have some experience. But an experienced warrior is an expert at swinging a sword. With a poor body like that, how can you even lift a sword?"

"Eh?"

Isyuram now looked at his body properly. Since his movements were normal, he thought his body was the same. He had spent years training his body and optimizing it for his techniques. However, this body was completely the opposite of his real body. Bony arms and legs stuck out from his leather clothes while his ribs were slightly sunken. Although it was a model-like body, Isyuram just thought that he looked malnourished.

“Huk, what is with this body?” Well, it is quite a decent body for a merchant.....”

“A merchant?”

Isyuram once again opened his information window. He hadn't checked it properly before, but 'merchant' was written down as his profession next to his level. Isyuram had no way of knowing but merchants were users who carried around goods. It was a job that dealt with trade and contracts. So his contract related skills were higher than other merchants while his strength and stamina was lower. The old man couldn't understand Isyuram and muttered.

“I thought your face was somewhat familiar and I finally remembered. Weren't you the merchant trying to gain exclusive contracts with our village last week? But you're acting like this is the first time. Did you bump your head and lose your memory?” That's right, Lee Myung-ryong had taken over the character of Isyuram from his predecessor. He changed the profession to a merchant because it was easier to gather information trading than hunting monsters.

Since he was level 150, as a merchant he invested his stat points into wisdom, intelligence and luck. It was reasonably decent stats for a merchant. Then suddenly the owner of the body changed. And he tried to move the poor merchant like he had a superhuman body. In other words, it was similar to a F-1 racing engine being installed into a truck. So Isyuram's body couldn't keep up with Lee Myung-ryong and broke. It was the difference between reality and games.....

If Lee Myung-ryong started off at level 1 in the novice village then he would learn the knowledge naturally and be experienced in the movements. That was the reason why the novice village existed. However, he just took over a level 150 character with no experience.

“I'm thankful that you wanted to help but please stop.”

The old man said before turning away. Isyuram couldn't speak and stood there dumbly. He had imagined New World like a playground. As a SWAT team member, he was experienced with all sorts of martial arts. When he went out on police business, he was the power of the 'tyrannical authorities' and would pull out the teeth of hooligans. Of course, the police agency wasn't a tyrannical force. No, really. However, there definitely were victims who received damage.

While most people considered New World a paradise where dreams come true, it was here that a martial artist was suffering frustration. He was not aware of what happened.....a disgraceful merchant? It was the reason why he couldn't experience the allure of a real battle in New World? The captain of the number 1 SWAT team, feared by other gangsters and he couldn't fight because of this body? Hyun-woo and

the other team members.....no, even a child was able to defeat a monster that he couldn't damage?

"I can't! No, there is no way!"

Isyuram clenched his fist and shouted. His pride had been damaged and he couldn't possible accept it.

'A poor body? A merchant? I am the captain of the number 1 SWAT team, Lee Myung-ryong. Am I going to run away scared because of this merchant body? Don't be ridiculous. I'll just create a proper body.'

Just like he helped train Ark's body, Isyuram believed that hard work would strengthen a body.

'There are some differences between a game and reality. If it's too easy then it wouldn't be a challenge. I will become the winner and beat this game! Who cares about investigation. I won't leave this place until I can defeat those dogs!'

Isyuram ran to a corner of the town.

"First I have to create a body. 5,000 punches! 5,000 kicks!"

And he began to exercise like crazy.

"What, what the?"

"Who is that merchant?"

The NPCs flocked around and started gossiping. However, Isyuram ignored them and only concentrated on remodelling his body. No matter how many times he broke his ankle or wrist, Isyuram just clenched his teeth and continued hitting the pillar. But this was Isyuram's mistake. Actually, only the commercial version of the unit for New World had the option to regulate the pain. Normally the system determined the amount of impact the user received after being attacked by a monster.

But the red gauge on this unit was set to 'reality.' 'Reality' meant the pain was similar to reality and was the highest option. In other words, he really felt like his arm was broken.

"Jajaja, shoryuken!"

Wududuk, snap!

Ouch! It is a virtual reality game..... but it's really painful like my arm actually broke. But Hyun-woo and the other members also suffered this much. I won't die from this much! Hiyah!"

His character was experiencing flesh and bone remodelling.

Act 4: Working Part-time at the Village in the Valley

"Phew.....we've finally arrived."

Around dawn, the skyrays finally set down at the village entrance. Even then Lariette was still clinging tightly to Ark with her eyes closed. Her arms wrapped around his waist still trembled even when they landed.

"Lariette-nim, it's fine now. We've arrived."

Lariette opened her eyes and looked around quickly. After seeing the ground, she let out a relieved sigh and said in a quivering voice.

"S-s-scary. It was really scary."

".....You endured it well."

"I'm never riding double again. I'm getting off."

Lariette dismounted from the skyray with a pale face. But she couldn't even walk a few steps before her weak legs collapsed.

"The heavens and earth is spinning.....ah, I still feel sick....."

'Well, isn't it reasonable?'

Ark scratched his head with an embarrassed expression. In fact, riding the skyrays wasn't that great. If he looked at the appearance of the skyray, the whole body was its wings. In other words, the whole body would shake every time it flapped its wings. Furthermore, there weren't any safety devices attached like amusement park rides. Even holding onto the reins, your body would still rock up and down with every flap so of course someone afraid of heights would fear for their life. That wasn't all.

The Netherworld wasn't a place where someone could rest peacefully while flying through the sky. Storms would randomly occur and they were even attacked by wild skyrays once or twice.....they experienced all of that during a 1 hour flight. In order to escape the many crises, they have to fly using complicated manoeuvres which tortured Lariette. Thanks to that, Lariette had a new phobia of skyrays and heights.

"Scary.....do you know how scary it was? Really, really, really scary. Sob, I'm never riding it again. Never ever. Do you understand? Sob."

Lariette muttered tearfully like a maniac. She was probably quite serious. But.....she looked like a little kid whining.....and he thought it was kind of cute. Anyway, she was in a panicked state for a while. In fact, this was actually an opportunity. Anyone would know that their impression would become more favourable if they spoke comforting words during this situation. Unfortunately, Ark didn't have a knack for such things. Dedric was much better at it compared to Ark.

"Sheesh, they can't understand the romance of flying.....women...."

Dedric pouted and muttered as he passed by.

"Well, I'm sorry for what happened a while ago. Although you'll be accompanying Master from now on, I'll recognize you as a colleague. But you better not mess with the number 2 person."

He seemed like a 4 year old apologizing to the girl he teased. Ark burst out laughing. But the childish words were unexpectedly accepted by Lariette. A faint smile appeared on Lariette's pale face. At the same time, her impression of Dedric which was at the very lowest 1 hour ago skyrocketed.

'Eh? What scene is this? That apology actually worked?'

Ark couldn't comprehend it. If Ark was in Lariette's position, he would immediately punch Dedric the moment he said something sassy. Men and women really were shaped differently.

'Well, at least Dedric and Lariette reconciled.'

"I'm going to take the skyrays to their kennel. Teacher is waiting so Ark and Bona should go there first."

Guran said before herding the skyrays to their kennel. Ark and Bona entered the village. When they entered, Beseutyu who had been waiting anxiously in front of his house rushed towards them. His complexion was haggard from a night of worrying

without any sleep. Bona had been behaving calmly so far, but he burst into tears when he saw his grandfather and ran towards him.

“Grandfather!”

“Sob, oh.....ooh...B-Bona!”

Beseutyu and Bona embraced each other while shedding tear. It had been two long days....eh? Come to think of it, it had been 16 hours since Ark arrived in the village which was 2 days game time. Their reaction made it seem like it had been a whole week. Well, anyone would be thrilled that their grandson came back alive after being kidnapped.

“I’m glad.”

Lariette muttered as her complexion seemed to return to normal. She felt a lot of affection for Bona since they had been captured together. Of course, Ark was also thrilled about the reunion. He had rescued the baby smurf from being eaten by Gargamel. Now it was time to be rewarded by Papa Smurf. Why wouldn’t he be thrilled? After a few moments, Beseutyu collected his feelings and led them towards his house.

“I’m sorry. They said that they wanted to help you. I didn’t realise they were villains targeting you.....my heart was so worried that I couldn’t see the motives.”

He was referring to when he leant Jewel’s group some skyrays. Ark just smiled and shook his head.

“No. I received their help anyway.”

He wouldn’t have been able to overcome Tamura without the help of Jewel’s party. Beseutyu’s head tilted but he didn’t question it. He only cared about the fact that his grandson was rescued.

“.....Honestly, I thought I was making a mistake when I heard that he was captured by the Nakujuk. I thought I would never see my grandson’s face again.....I don’t know how I can repay the favour.”

“It was my pleasure. I couldn’t just stand by and watch as a little boy was sacrificed by a wicked group. But I won’t reject Beseutyu’s sincere heart.”

Ark replied modestly. He was mindful of his words since Buksil was filming it on the magic projector. He didn’t want to make it obvious that he was aiming for a

reward. Ark was smart and danced around the subject. Beseutyu nodded with an impressed face.

“You really are like the incarnation of Rarukan.”

“Rarukan? I’ve heard Guran say that before.....who is Rarukan?”

Ark didn’t ask this because of mere curiosity. Guran had mentioned the name Rarukan once. When an NPC mentioned something, there was a high possibility that it was important information. For example, it could be related to a quest or related to a quest compensation item. That’s right. It was similar to the bold letters in the NPC’s dialogue in the old RPG games. Beseutyu waited a moment before answering.

“Rarukan is a legendary warrior in our tribe.”

“Legendary warrior?”

“To be more precise, Rarukan is the god of abundance in our clan. But a long time ago we were driven from the North by the Nakujuk clan who tried to exterminate us. Then a warrior appeared and saved us. Although we tried to reward him, he disappeared without even telling us his name so we just called him Rarukan.”

Disappearing without compensation?

“Ah, indeed. That’s right!”

At that moment, Beseutyu jumped up. Then he began to rummage through a pile of boxes in the corner.

“It should be somewhere here.....no, it’s not. Somewhere.....oh, here it is!”

Beseutyu returned holding a small jewellery box.

“I was wondering how I should repay you, but I remembered thanks to you asking about Rarukan. This will be useful for you.”

Inside the jewellery box was a ring. It seemed quite old but a faint light was shining from the stylish ring.

“This ring was specially designed with gratitude and respect towards Rarukan. Although our Baran clan is now scattered, we once had a lot of influence in the North. And this ring was created using the best materials we could find and the best workmanship. But Rarukan did not receive this ring. After that we kept it with the family of the Baran’s record-keepers.....as the incarnation of Rarukan, I think you have the qualifications to receive this ring.”

It must be a requirement to hear the story before receiving the ring. Although it was the latest technology, the common sense from old RPG games was really useful! With the words 'ancient' and 'legend,' it wasn't an exaggeration to say that the item should be one of the finest.

'Huk, a level 200 unique ring!'

Rarukan's Ring (Unique)

Item type: Ring

User restriction: Level 200 and more

A ring specially designed by the inhabitants of the Netherworld for the legendary warrior Rarukan.

This ring was designed a long time ago when the Baran clan still prospered. The size is small but it was made with a special type of ore that contains the rare magic of the Netherworld. In addition, the ring possesses a jewel which has the power to protect the wearer from darkness. The inside of the ring is carved with 'Homage to Rarukan.'

<Option: Agility +10, Attack Speed +10, Critical Hit +8%>

<Special Option: You can use the skill 'Dark Protection.' When used in the darkness, your defense and magic resistance will increase by 20% for 5 minutes. Cool down time: 2 hours>

Ark's mouth dropped at the information window. He didn't need to explain it, but it was definitely a jackpot. This was his ring. Unlike weapons and armour, normally rings didn't have a secondary option. In fact, even the rare ring Ark was wearing now only had the skill 'Mind's Eye' without any added bonuses. However, three options.....2 of them were valuable options which increased his attack speed and critical hit. Those two options were difficult to find in magic items.

'My attack speed and critical hit probability dropped once I changed to Gwisal's sword.....but this ring increases my defense as well.....!'

But was that all? It even had 'Dark Protection' as a special option.

This increased his defense and magic resistance by 20%. The standard of the skill wasn't that high, but it only had a 2 hour cool down time. It was a skill that could be utilized actively.

‘As expected, it was good to ask about Rarukan! It gave me a unique ring!’

Ark was delighted. He would explain it briefly, but there were 5 types of items in New World. General, magic, rare, unique and legendary. Anyone who played the game would know about these 5 types. General items were considered as japtem, magic items more common and it was extremely difficult to find rare items with a good option. A unique item was definitely unique. Unique items were similar to rare items but the performance was slightly better. In some cases, it might even have a lower performance. The reason it was more expensive on auction sites was because of its scarcity. While several of the same rare items could exist, there was only 1 of every unique item. In other words, Rarukan’s ring was the only one that existed in New World.

Well, a legendary item had the best performance and options but it was so rare that none had been seen yet.....anyway, a unique item was also hard to obtain. Of course, it was the best selling items on the auction site.

‘The Netherworld is the land of opportunity!’

Very few people had come to the Netherworld. A lot of the quests were being completed for the first time by Ark. It meant that he could grab the best rewards from the quests. It was natural. NPCs couldn’t get rid of the items. So the first person to complete the NPC’s quest would probably receive his best item. Since it wasn’t possible to receive the same reward, other people who complete it would just receive a similar one. That’s why the biggest rewards were given to users who discovered a new area. Of course, such opportunities weren’t just given. If he hadn’t asked about Rarukan then it would’ve been replaced with another item. That’s why he had to pay attention to receive the best reward. Discovering the backstory was the whole point of a game.

“Omo, it’s a pretty looking ring.”

As a woman, Lariette was also interested in the ring.

“Uh-hum, thank you very much. I will use it well.”

Ark coughed and hurriedly packed the ring into his bag.

-The quest <Rescue Bona> has been completed

He increased 3 levels after the message appeared. Thus he completed the first quest he received in the Netherworld.

“By the way, the information I wanted you to check.....”

“Oh, about that person called Magaro?”

Buksil jumped when he heard the name Magaro. However, Ark deliberately pretended not to notice and continued talking.

“Yes, did you find anything?”

“I’m sorry. I’ve been so worried about Bona that I haven’t checked yet.”

Beseutyu pointed towards the large stack of scrolls.

“I’ll start looking for it now. But what you see here is all the records from the past hundreds of years. If it was related to a special event then it’ll be indicated separately and I could find it immediately. But looking for the record of a simple visitor is more difficult. So please wait 3 days.”

‘Three days.....but waiting is not the problem.....’

There was no doubt that Jewel updated her resurrection point to this village. It had been 11 hours since those guys died in the Abyss of Despair so there was still 19 hours until resurrection, but 24 hours in reality was 3 days in game time. Jewel would eventually resurrect here. Ark was worried for a while before he thought of a method.

“I understand. I will wait three days. But I have one request.”

“Request? What is it? I do whatever you say.”

His intimacy with Beseutyu had soared after rescuing Bona. And he grinned and nodded at Ark’s words.

“That won’t be difficult. Understood, 2 days later did you say? I will do it.”

“And there is something else I want you to check.

Ark briefly explained about the Red Man who appeared after he defeated Tamura.

“A man with red hair wearing a white mask. He also crossed into the Netherworld from middle earth. There is a high possibility that he had entered the Netherworld before. Please see if you can find any data on it.”

He was behind the events that happened in the Underground World. So he had been in middle earth until then. If he entered the Netherworld immediately then it would’ve been a couple of months ago. Ark was convinced that the Red Man held the key to passing the entrance examination. And he might have some ulterior

motive if he ran away. He would continue to look for information while completing Magaro's quest.

"I see. Don't worry and just rest comfortably."

Beseutyu raised his arms and headed to the stacks of scrolls. After summarizing the situation, Ark headed outside.

"Ark-nim, will you wait here until you receive the information? I'm going to log out for a little bit. Because of the earlier flight....."

Lariette said with an unsteady face.

"Yes, you can enter at this time tomorrow."

"Me too.....I've been playing the game for 15 hours so I'm sleepy....."

Buksil had stayed up all night following Ark so he also quit the game.

"So what will I do now.....?"

Ark murmured after being left alone on the street. He had stayed up all night so it was dawn in reality. Normally at this point it was time to go to the gym. But yesterday, Ark had received an unexpected phone call from Lee Myung-ryong.

"Hyun-woo, I won't be able to go to the gym for a while due to various circumstances. So don't come back to the gym until I contact you. Don't just play around and make sure to exercise properly. I'll get back to you after a couple of months. Don't ever go near the gym. Okay?"

The police agency had spread rumours of Lee Myung-ryong's demotion to the Special Crimes Countermeasures squad. Lee Myung-ryong wanted to prevent Ark from hearing those rumours at the gym. Thanks to that, Ark didn't have a set time to sleep or exercise.

'I can't just wait around town.....should I get some sleep or hunt in the area? Oh, before that.....'

Ark took out Rarukan's ring from his bag. He couldn't wear it while Lariette was still present. Ark contemplated for a moment before removing 'Mind's Eye.'

'Mind's Eye' was a rare ring but it only had a skill and no other options. On the other hand, 'Resurrecting Spirit' boosted his strength and mana recovery. So using the magic ring would be better.

'I don't use Mind's Eye that frequently so I should only wear it when necessary.'

With an excited expression, Ark moved Rarukan's ring towards his finger. And just as he was about to put it on....!

"Ark-nim!"

Ark suddenly heard a voice from behind him and dropped the ring.

"Huk, my ring! My ring! Ah, here it is. My ring!"

Ark scrambled for the ring on the ground and grasped it tightly. He looked like a hungry beggar picking up a three day old piece of bread. He had acted instinctively. When he raised his head and blinked, he realised that it was Bona who had sneaked up on him.

"Hum hum hum, the soil here is pretty good."

"Do you like pretty rings?"

Bona asked while Ark smiled awkwardly. Ark's face turned red at the sight of Bona's friendly face.

"Ah.....as the number 2 I am so ashamed."

Dedric sighed.

Ark awkwardly grinned and nodded.

"Well, that, that is....."

"Ark-nim, please follow me. I'll show you around the village."

"Visit the village?"

Ark said with an uncomfortable look. Ark was a human. What person would be able to play the game for 20 hours without getting tired? But now he had to go around the village instead of hunting? But Bona just grabbed Ark's arm and dragged him along. Ark didn't dare reject Bona so he was inevitably dragged along. However, it wasn't a bad choice to follow.

'Eh? There was something like this in the village?'

Ark hadn't even explored 50% of the village.

"This is a sap refinery. There are a lot of trees with special characteristics in the forests near here. We extract the sap, refine it and then barter with other villages related to us. In addition, we have a variety of plants in our fields."

Bona guided him to a workshop he hadn't seen before. Since it was concerned with the village's production, outsiders were forbidden from entering there. However, he was able to access most areas if Bona accompanied him. After touring, Ark's opinion of the Myutal changed a little bit. The Myutal....no, the Baran tribe was not as uncivilized as Ark thought. The Umma's Sap and Nadingka's Fruit that Ark bought were items produced by the village. Since most of the products were used to trade with other tribes, they only had a few of them.

'Is money not used because of the limited trading?'

If someone was trading multiple items from many places then it was recommended to use money. However, if the exchange was limited to the tribe and 1-on-1 then there was no reason to use money.

'They have no problem with production, but they are unable to sustain a large production system so the economy couldn't develop. If they were able to move freely between middle earth then they could develop a large profit....'

Ark connected everything to making money. And there were definitely a lot of ingredients scattered around that would make money. The Baran tribe was not limited to just this village in the valley. There were a large number of them spread out over a wide area. If he was the intermediary for the villages which produced items, or create a currency exchange between the Myutal then the fees he could collect for doing it would be 3~4 times what he would earn from a castle. But that was only if he could freely move between middle earth and the Netherworld. Since he was stuck in the Netherworld at the moment, he decided to contemplate the idea later.

'Well, it's not possible at the moment. I'm just fortunate to be able to monopolize the dungeons and quests.'

"Here's the monster kennels."

Bona said as he guided Ark towards a sparse cave with walls.

In fact, the biggest feature of the valley town was the tamed monsters.

"Ah Ark-nim, you have come?"

Guran waved his hand from inside the kennel.

"Guran helps look after the skyray for Grandpa."

"Actually, that's my day job."

Guran laughed and nodded.

"There are a lot of monsters."

"Yes, we have 20 trainers here including Teacher. Each trainer tames around 10 monsters so there are approximately 200 altogether."

"Managing something like this must not be easy."

"But if there were no monsters then we wouldn't be able to settle in a place like this."

Guran looked at the monsters with proud eyes. Of course, training monsters wasn't cheap since they had to be fed and taught.

"You've seen it already but we use the skyrays to barter with other towns. And these monsters are good for field work."

Guran explained the many ways the Baran tribe used the monsters. The Predator that Ark defeated while crossing the wilderness was used for field work. These monsters had similar attributes to earthworms. Their excretion made a good fertilizer for the fields. The Predators were the reason why the Baran could harvest the crops in the barren land. In addition, a monster called Hellhound was a guard dog that protected the village. Since the Baran tribe's combat ability was low, the Hellhounds were the reason why they could repel attacks by other monsters.

"The relationship between the Baran tribe and the monsters is inseparable."

But Ark was full of wild ideas while looking at the monster kennels.

'These monsters are suitable to make a safari.....low level users can spar against them as practice.....and the skyrays could be used to create guided tours of the Netherworld....'

He came up with a brilliant business plan. However, Ark soon sighed and shook his head.

'I shouldn't get too ahead of myself.'

This business idea is under the assumption that people can move freely between middle earth and the Netherworld. And just the initial investment into the business would be astronomical. It would require far more money than Ark's 4,000 gold.

‘I wouldn’t even be able to attempt it with that much money.....’

Ark sighed as he stood inside the kennel. Then Bona looked at him strangely.

“Ark-nim, what happened?”

“A child doesn’t need to know.”

Ark muttered in a pained voice. Then he heard a rough voice not far from the kennel.

Meeeeeeeeeee, meeeeeeee.

“This guy, why can’t he hold still?”

He turned around and saw a Myutal holding a knife and chasing after a sheep-like animal. Bona saw Ark’s curiosity and quickly explained.

“That is the barn. It is where we raise edible livestock called Pepe. Ajusshi!”

Bona waved towards the barn owner who turned his head.

“Ah, isn’t that Bona? Guran told me what happened. Wasn’t it pretty serious? There is a lot I would like to ask but I’ll have to leave it to later. My stupid assistant got the payment date wrong so I have to catch two hundred of them by tomorrow. He couldn’t even come today so he became ill. It is really serious.”

The barn owner murmured in an irritated voice.

“Two hundred?”

“Yes, I need to deliver 200 meat and leather to Sandstorm Village in 4 days. Since I have to carry it there, I need to catch everything by tomorrow evening. Oh! Yes Bona, will you help me? You can’t groom the Pepe but you can hold them still. I’m so desperate that I would use any free hands.”

“Of course I would like to help.....”

Bona studied Ark’s face quickly. Then Ark had a brilliant idea.

‘Wait, meat and leather? Then perhaps.....?’

“Can I help Bona as well?”

“Huh? You are?”

“He’s the person who saved me.”

“Oh, yes!”

The barn owner looked at Ark with surprise and nodded.

“Good, right now anyone is welcome. Do you have any experience dealing with cattle?”

“No, but I’ll work hard if you teach me.”

“Well, you have the right attitude. Understood. Then I’ll catch the Pepe while you peel off the leather and parts of the meat. When you finish then Bona will take it to the drying room. If we finish within the time limit then I’ll reward you generously.”

A quest window appeared after the barn owner’s words.

Catch the Pepe in the Valley Village.

The owner of the barn in the village is in big trouble because of a mix up with the delivery date. You must obtain 200 Pepe meat and leather within the next two days. If you don’t finish in time for the delivery then you will lose the barn owner’s respect.

Difficulty: –

So Ark began a part-time job. In fact, the novice villages normally had such easy quests. They consisted of carrying stuff, cleaning warehouses or looking after a store for the owner. There was also significantly less compensation for the simple quests. But there was a reason why Ark accepted the job even though he was tired.

‘Damn, who knew that I would need such a thing?’

Anger welled up when Ark thought about it. After defeating Tamura, he had received the ‘Necromancer’s Essence.’ After making Razak evolve, he had taken out his pot and checked the necessary recipe.

‘Necromancer’s Immortality Pill’ recipe.

Shining Jelly Necromancer’s Essence 1/1

Heart of the Dead 0/2000

Skin of the Dead 0/2000

Ark was unhappy after seeing the information window. 'Heart of the Dead' or 'Skin of the Dead' were items that sometimes dropped from undead monsters. Since the drop rate was so low, he had collected them initially. However, they were just japtem. Even the stores wouldn't buy them. So he just disposed of the item whenever it dropped. But now he needed 4,000 of them?

'Dammit, I've already thrown away 1,000 of them.....'

He had just thrown away 1/4 of the ingredients necessary. Although the results would still be the same even if he hadn't thrown it away. The drop rate for these two ingredients was really low. Ark had killed a significant number of undead but had only found 1,000 of them. If he used simple calculations then he would need to kill forty thousand to make the immortality pill. A few days.....no, it would surely take months to make.

'Oh, I don't know. I'll complete it someday.'

So Ark had given up halfway when he saw the recipe. But that changed after hearing the barn owner's words.

'Wait, if I work here then wouldn't I be able to learn butchery and leather extraction? So it might be easier to collect the ingredients.'

Yes, Ark hadn't accepted the job for no reason. Of course, it was possible to obtain leather and meat from monsters without these skills. However, the probability was only 20% while it would increase to 70% if he used these skills to collect meat and leather from dead monsters. He actually had the chance to learn these skills before but he chose to learn Ingredient Foraging since it was more useful for Survival Cooking. But now things had changed.

'Heart of the Dead is meat while Skin of the Dead is leather. Learning the leather extraction and butchery skills will make my ingredient collection a few times faster.'

He had a lot of downtime so now was the perfect time to learn it.

"Come, let's start straight away."

The barn owner handed him a knife. Then Ark sat down and began to work.

"This one!"

Meeeeeeek!

The barn owner grabbed the first Pepe, cut off its head and peeled off the leather. He thought it would be simple but it wasn't that easy when he first started. He learned how to dismantle from the barn owner, but if he didn't do it properly then the leather would tear or the meat would be damaged. Indeed, doing the job without the skills was impossible.

-You have made a mistake using the dismantling knife and ruined the Pepe leather.

<The worth of the leather Pepe goods has dropped by 70%>

-You have made a mistake using the dismantling knife and the Pepe meat has become spoiled.

<The value of the Pepe meat has dropped by 40%>

The barn owner's face fell every time the messages appeared.

"Dammit, are you going to eat up my entire farm?"

"I'm really sorry."

"You can't decrease the commercial value of my goods. Don't you know how much I treasured them while raising them? Ugh, they're just cattle but I've raised them like they were my children. I shed tears every time I have to catch one. Yet now you're spoiling the precious leather and meat?"

Ark clenched the knife as he held it to the cattle's neck.....he felt like exploding but he endured it. It wasn't easy to meet NPCs that could teach these techniques. Luckily Ark also had some support.

"Ajusshi! Why are you saying such things? Ark-hyung is just trying to help ajusshi out. But the work is difficult which is why he is clumsy. In addition, Ark-hyung is a warrior. It is natural for him to be clumsy."

'Oh Bona, I'm really glad I rescued you! This hyung is strongly impressed!'

Bona's words were effective. The barn owner sighed and scratched his head with an uncomfortable expression.

"Yes I see. I'm sorry. I was irrational for a little bit....."

"No. It is because I am lacking. My chest also hurts after I ruined the leather and meat of the Pepe. Can you teach me some more tips?"

"I understand."

The barn owner sat near Ark and explained to him the way to use the knife. Ark listened obediently to the barn owner and his understanding went up.

The only requirement to learn skills like these in New World was 'Understanding.' It was a number which showed how much he understood the work. If he repeated the work then it was possible to raise this number. However, learning from NPCs specialized in the work would increase the understanding at a much faster rate. Ark cunningly took advantage of this system.

"Whoops! Another one ruined! Damn, I'm really rubbish! I once again spoiled something that ajusshi raised like his child.....waaaah, someone like me should die!"

Ark blamed himself and crazily waved the knife when he failed again. The barn owner was so surprised that he couldn't even be mad.

"What? Even though I taught you again....eh? Hey, please calm down. The Pepe is like my children but is it worth dying over them? Okay, I understand your heart. It is impossible to get used to it the first time. Sit down and I'll teach you again from the beginning."

The owner made Ark sit down and began to explain the tips from the beginning. Thanks to that, Ark's understanding rose quickly and 5 hours passed.....

You have learned a new skill.

Leather Extraction (Beginner, Passive): You can use a dismantling knife to extract leather from domestic animals, wild animals and monsters. The leather obtained can be used as material in the creation of leather armour. However, the probability of success depends on the skill level and the monster's level.

You have learned a new skill.

Butchery (Beginner, Passive): You can use the dismantling knife to obtain meat from domestic animals, wild animals and monsters. The resulting meat can be used as an ingredient in various dishes. However, the success rate depends on the monster's level and the skill level.

'That's it!'

He was finally able to learn the desired skills. Since the cattle was only level 1, he could peel off the Pepe's leather immediately. After that Ark's hands flashed as he successfully obtained the Pepe's meat and leather. In addition, the value of the leather and meat didn't fall at all.

“Oh, now you’ve got the hang of it.”

“Huhuhu, it was thanks to ajusshi’s teachings.”

Ark could even communicate as he stripped the leather. Thus the production speed increased and he finished the remaining Pepe in 3 hours.

“Phew, I’ll be able to make the delivery date thanks to you and Bona. I want to give you a gift since you’ve helped me with my work.....ah, right. I’ll give you this. It is the dismantling knife although it is also good as a long knife. And this is the Pepe’s meat.”

The barn owner gave him the dismantling knife and meat as a reward.

Butcher’s Knife

A professional knife used to obtain leather and meat.

<Increases the success probability of Leather Extraction and Butchering by 20%>

Pepe’s Fillet (5)

The meat of the cattle Pepe who was raised in the Netherworld. The meat is so fresh that you can eat it as sashimi

The quest <Catch the Pepe in the Valley Village> has been completed.

<Additional compensation: Leather Extraction and Butchering +20>

At the same time, the quest had been completed. Since it was a production quest, the bonus was always skill experience or proficiency.

‘A food item and bonus skill proficiency! The part time quest was really useful!’

“Thank you.”

“Hahaha, I am even more thankful. Please grill the Pepe meat and eat it. The taste is really amazing. That reminds me, shouldn’t I get going? I should eat before completing my delivery.”

Meeeeeeeee, meeeeeeee!

The barn owner turned wicked eyes towards the Pepe who cried out and trembled.

Hey, hey, wasn't that his children? Didn't he shed tears everything he had to catch one? So he would eat it even while shedding tears?

Ark wanted to get up but his calves were too tired. After receiving the quest to rescue Bona, he hadn't had a chance to shut his eyes.

"Then I'll take this and go."

Ark said goodbye to Bona and the barn owner before terminating the connection.

Act 5: Locate the Laboratory

"Damn!"

A dim light appeared at the totem as a magician appeared. It was Jewel who had self-destructed in the Abyss of Despair. Jewel checked her information window and clenched her teeth.

"That damn bastard Ark.....I'm going to pay him back several times!"

The self-destruct magic was critical against enemies but it was also lethal to Jewel. Although she dealt a tremendous amount of damage in a wide range, she received 3 times the death penalty. In other words, she lost 90% experience and all stats -3. Although she already knew such details, tears gathered when she actually saw it.

'Dammit, it will take so long to recover that 90% experience.....in addition, how can I recover the 18 stats lost before levelling up?'

All this was because of Ark. If she hadn't been tricked by Ark then she wouldn't have needed to use that skill. If Jewel realised how much her self-destruct ended up helping Ark then she probably would've exploded again. Nevertheless, ignorance was bliss. So Jewel just furiously waited until the other members had resurrected. Duke rushed up to her and said.

"Jewel, where is that Ark bastard now?"

"Damn it, how should I know?"

"What do you mean? Check with Mana Perfume."

"Of course I've already tried it. But there was no reaction."

"What? He removed the curse?"

"What other explanation is there? He must've been carrying a [Curse release] scroll."

".....What now?"

Duke asked with a serious face but Jewel didn't know. The group dedicated to killing Ark sighed. Then Beseutyu who had been lingering nearby ran up to them.

"Ah, look, it is you guys....!"

"Eh? The old man who gave Ark the quest?"

"Please. My grandson, please rescue my grandson!"

"What is that?"

Beseutyu grabbed Jewel's arm and begged.

"You've already heard what happened. You guys appeared after Ark who just left. He said that he went to the Abyss of Despair and ran away when he saw it was hopeless. After seeing you appear at the totem, I know that you fought against the Nakujuk until the end. You're different from Ark."

"That's right. That bastard Ark is no match for us."

Jewel snorted before nodding.

"My hunch was correct. Yes, I knew I could trust you. Since you've returned, I must request this of you. Would you not go back to the Abyss of Despair?"

Jewel and Duke looked at each other after hearing Beseutyu's words. They exchanged looks for a while before Jewel spoke.

"That's right. Indeed, if we were all wiped out then he would have no chance. I understand. It won't be an easy opponent but we'll save your grandson."

"Thank you, thank you!"

"But where did Ark go?"

"Why.....?"

"In fact, we suffered serious injuries while fighting the Nakujuk to rescue your grandson because he stole our equipment and fled. We can't forgive such a lousy bastard. After rescuing your grandson, we want to find him and make him pay for his sins."

Beseutyu gnashed his teeth at Jewel's explanation.

"Such a dirty thing.....I knew he was strange. That's why he refused to wait for you and just ran off. I know. I heard him say that he would go to the city beyond the northern mountains."

"Was a mount used?"

"No. There is no reason to lend a mount to the person who abandoned my grandson. He went on foot so he shouldn't have gone too far. After saving my grandson, I'll allow you to borrow the skyrays and chase him."

There was a cold smile on Jewel's face.

"Duke, did you hear that? He went to the city on the other side of the mountains."

"Okay, everybody get ready. Let's depart."

"Eh? You guys. What are you saying? Then my grandson.....?"

"Who cares!"

Jewel pushed Beseutyu out of the way.

"Your grandson has already been eaten by Tamura."

"I have no interest in continuing a quest which already failed."

"I'm more concerned with Ark. Now, let's go!"

Jewel immediately used 'Quick' magic on the group. Their movement speed increased by 20% thanks to the spell and there was a billow of dust as they rushed towards the north.

"Grandpa, are you okay?"

After a while, Bona ran up from where he was hiding nearby.

"Bah, they're bad people just like Ark-hyung said."

".....They have no honour."

Beseutyu snorted as he turned to watch them disappear.

"That's what they get for trying to annoy Bona's saviour. There is no city beyond the mountains, only the territory of the main Nakujuk clan. They will end up suffering."

"But the way, did grandfather find what Ark-hyung was looking for?"

"Of course. Well let's return. Ark said he would be coming back now."

Beseutyu and Bona smiled before returning to the village.

"Now it is safe. They have left for the northern mountains."

"Thanks for the good work."

"I acted just like you told me to."

There was a wily smile on Ark's face after Beseutyu's answer.

'Now I don't have to worry about those guys. They'll soon discover that they made a mistake, but without the help of magic they won't be able to find me easily.'

Thus one of his worries disappeared. Now the only thing left was to find any clues related to Magaro. Ark looked expectantly at Beseutyu who smiled and nodded.

"I've found the information you need."

"Something related to Magaro?"

"Yes, he came here approximately 100 years ago. Well, read it yourself will be faster than me explaining. It's been translated so you can read it."

Were the resources recorded using a special cipher to maintain secrecy? It was probably a countermeasure to ensure that users couldn't abuse their knowledge of the Netherworld. Since Ark was entitled to the information, Beseutyu translated it onto a scroll and passed it to him.

'I can finally discover the whereabouts of Magaro!'

Ark unrolled it with anticipation. It was recorded in first person format, just like a diary or letter.

.....*He introduced himself as Magaro.*

Magaro was an unusually polite and sincere person. It surprised me that he crossed from middle earth. I heard that people could pass freely between middle earth and the Netherworld a long time ago, but I thought it was just a legend or myth. But he proved that middle earth existed and that it was a much more advanced civilization. He was very clever. Although he only saw the flora and fauna here for the first time, within a few days he was able to understand their attributes and how best to use them. He taught us how to refine the sap of plants in order to heal wounds and how to live a more abundant life by raising cattle.

However, he was forced to leave the village after a month. He came to the Netherworld for a 'special' purpose and he needed more research materials for that purpose. I informed him about the 'Forest of Life' in the eastern wilderness where he could find those materials. He could obtain everything he needed from there. Unfortunately, I never saw him again.....

'.....That explains it.'

Ark noticed some strange associations while reading the document. When he saw the sap refinery, the first thing that came to mind was the Magic Institute's alchemy lab. The standard of the equipment was very different but the structure was somewhat similar. He discovered the reason after reading the record. Magaro was a genius alchemist so he taught them how to use the sap.

'As expected from the alchemist Magaro. But I still don't know Magaro's secret purpose which is the reason he came to the Netherworld.....'

It definitely smelled like money.

"I was also surprised after reading this record. I didn't realise that the person who taught us how to use sap and herbs came from middle earth."

"Where is the Forest of Life?"

"I've never gone there directly, but if you head to the eastern wilderness on the south-east side then you should find it."

Then he opened up the map and indicated the area with a red dot. The location was close to the snowy mountains that Ark descended down.

'It will take me a few days if I move in a straight line. But at least I know the location.'

Ark stored the map and asked.

"By the way, did you find any information about the Red Man?"

"Ah, you mean that?"

Beseutyu shook his head.

"I couldn't find any information about that person."

"Really?"

Ark was only a little bit disappointed. In fact, he hadn't expected anything. He had received a quest to find Magaro's laboratory. It was possible to receive information related to this because he received the quest. That's because the clues for the quest were intentionally placed from the beginning. However, the Red Man had nothing to do with this quest. And Ark didn't know what he needed to investigate. He only had a vague thought of finding the Red Man. If he didn't know what he was looking for then there was no way he would receive a clue. Above all. He really needed to determine if the Red Man held the 'key' to passing the entrance examination.

'It can't be helped. There's nothing for me to find at the moment.'

Ark finished collecting the information and packed for a new trip. He re-examined his equipment and stopped by the general store to barter for useable medicines. By that time Lariette and Buksil had finished resting and connected to the game.

"Ark-nim, I'm not late?"

"Yes, you came right on time."

"Where are you going now?"

"The Forest of Life in the wilderness to the east. The distance is quite far so we should leave quickly."

When Ark seemed like he would leave straight away, Beseutyu spoke in a worried voice.

"Hmm, can you leave tomorrow morning?"

"No. I've rested so it doesn't matter if it is morning or evening."

In fact, evening was the best time for a Dark Walker to travel.

"Then how about you take a skyray and go?"

Lariette was so surprised that she flinched and turned pale.

‘S-Skyrays? Ah, Ark-nim....’

“Thank you but it is fine. I’ll walk this time.”

Lariette sighed with relief and laughed when Ark refused. But Ark didn’t decline just because of Lariette.

‘The skyray moves faster but that’s all.’

There were still a lot of ingredients that he hadn’t seen in the Netherworld. He would miss those opportunities if he flew on the skyray. In addition, he confirmed that there were quite a few wild skyrays in the east when he travelled to this village. If he flew on the skyrays then a battle was inevitable.

‘There are too many variables in aerial combat compared to ground combat. When returning from the Abyss of Despair, it was difficult to defeat four or five skyrays while protecting Lariette and Buksil. So I would rather walk even if it takes longer. Well, it’s not like anything is urgent at the moment.....’

“Then we’ll be going.”

“Please feel free to drop by. You are always welcome.”

“Ark hyung, Lariette-noona, please make sure to come back when your business finishes!”

Bona chased them to the entrance and shook their hands.

“Okay, I understand.” Now, let’s go.”

“Yes.”

Lariette smiled and nodded. Ark turned his head without thinking and looked at her. The sun had started to set and it dyed the surroundings red. It was dark but light, it felt regretful but his heart was also beating fast.....it was like she was standing in a mysterious space. Her whole body was dyed in a mysterious light and made her even more beautiful. It was difficult to express in words as elusive emotions rose in him.

‘Travelling in the Netherworld is unlikely to become boring.’

‘Something.....this isn’t something.’

A mysterious world with a woman who longed for adventure! It was like a movie where the protagonist had a fateful encounter with the heroine and they ended up

exploring and fighting monsters together, with the hero sometimes saving the heroine. After overcoming numerous adversities, the two protagonists finally found the treasure and began a relationship with each other. Wasn't it a dream that all men would aspire to? Although they hadn't reached the ending, Ark was lost in the sweet fantasy after exiting the village with Lariette.

But reality wasn't that superficial. Ark's reality was not that superficial.

Ark sighed and looked at his colleagues eating a meal.

"Ah, this is really good?"

"It really is. Ark-nim is also good at cooking."

"Really? It's delicious?"

Dedric was ravenously licking the pot like a pig. After he refilled the pot, it was once again emptied as they continued chattering.

"Master, did you hear that? Another serving of this."

It was a ridiculous situation. He had made dishes from the ingredients collected. In addition, Ark had lost 50% of his health but he wasn't even able to eat one spoonful. The pot was emptied yet he wanted another serving? And is such a demanding tone? Ark had a bitter taste in his mouth at the sight. No, he really wanted to punch him. However.....

"I'm sorry. We ate everything without leaving anything for Ark-nim."

When Lariette spoke, Ark's fist which had been heading towards Dedric suddenly changed into patting his head.

"Ah, no. You should eat well. Hahaha."

"Yes, don't worry about it. Master's hobby is feeding others."

Dedric smirked at his words. And the naive Lariette just nodded.

"So your original hobby was cooking?"

"Huh? Ah, yes....that's right."

Ark awkwardly smiled before whispering to Dedric.

"You, you bastard! Are you afraid for your future?"

“What?”

Dedric just whistled as he stared at the distant mountains. Something.....his instincts sensed that something was happening. Although he behaved for a while, that fellow was once again starting to behave hatefully and he even became worse than before.

‘Damn, I made a mistake. If I knew this would happen then I wouldn’t have called him the number 2.....I forgot that he was a child and that it would go to his head.’

But who could he blame? This situation was due to his own mistakes..... Ark sighed again and looked through his bag. Then he poured a few ingredients into the pot with tears in his eyes.

‘How much money are the ingredients I poured into this pot worth?’

Ark replayed the past events in his head. In the beginning.....everything was good when they left the valley village.

“Omo, look at that river. It is a rainbow of colours.”

“Have you seen this? If you blow the flowers then the wind will blow it back into your mouth. Hohoho.”

“That looks like a human face but it is creepy.”

Lariette explored the area with childlike excitement in her eyes.

“Please be careful. It is a monster that will attack anything that approached.”

“Huh? Really?”

Ark laughed at Lariette’s amazement and added.

“Hahaha. It won’t attack unless you approach so it’ll be okay.”

She had arrived in the Netherworld before Ark. However, she appeared in the Hagel Forest surrounded by the dead and didn’t have time to explore before being captured by the Nakujuk. So she was curious and excited about everything. Ark also enjoyed watching her. And he explained everything that she developed an interest in. For someone.....it was quite enjoyable having a girl interested in his words. Monsters appeared occasionally but it didn’t matter. Ark had already faced these monsters several times while heading to the village from the snowy mountains.

The level was higher but no more than two appeared at once. In addition, Ark's level was much higher than before. After killing hundreds of Nakujuk in the Abyss of Despair and completing the quest, he was level 256!

"Buksil, take it well."

Ark whispered to Buksil before drawing his sword. Then he used flashy movements to dispose of the monsters. The video was shooting, but how could he fight normally in front of Lariette?

"Wah! It's fantastic! You took care of those strong monsters so easily....."

Ark's nose rose in the air at Lariette's interjection.

"It's not a big deal."

Ark said with fake humility. After Lariette's reaction, Ark immediately began to exaggerate his actions. Ark was generous when cooking food and pretended not to notice when his pets made a mistake. He couldn't be an unpleasant person in front of her. So Ark's normal behaviour was stopped by Lariette's presence. It was indeed a pleasing scene when he recalled it.

But the good memories with Lariette only lasted until then. He was so entrance by Lariette then the trip through the wilderness passed without him noticing. They soon reached the south where the wilderness changed into dense forests.

"The forest continues from here. It seems to be a checkpoint which will lead to the Forest of Life. This is my first time here so I don't know what the monsters will be like. Dedric, reconnaissance."

"Understood. Master."

Dedric flapped his wings for the first time after several days. However, he couldn't make it a few metres before he started gasping.

"What the, what happened?"

"I don't know. Somehow I became very winded?"

Ark glanced around but couldn't spot anything unusual.

Could it be.....? Ark looked uneasily at Dedric's body. He finally noticed that Dedric was subtly different from normal.

'What the? When did this child.....?'

While showing off his cooking skill to Lariette, Ark had used barrage of ingredients. But Lariette was not a glutton. More than half of the meal remained every time so his pets and Buksil would eat the rest. On the other hand, only one or two monsters appeared at the same time in the wilderness. So he didn't need Dedric to scout or fight with him. As a result.....it was like Dedric received a holiday as he continuously partook in holiday foods. In other words, the excess nutrient intake and lack of exercise meant that he became bigger. It was also true for Razak and Buksil. Buksil.....well, he looked even more like a pig while Dedric's bones also thickened.

'Oh my god, why didn't I notice until now?'

Lariette had distracted him. Anyway, Ark finally noticed what was happening and became astounded.

Kikikiki! Kikiki, kikikiki!

The branches suddenly shook and they were surrounded by a mass of red pupils.

'Monster! There's around a dozen of them!'

"Buksil, Lariette-nim, step back! Dedric, Razak, defense formation!"

"Oh, it is hard.....understood Master."

Clack clack.....clack clack clack....

His summons replied in relaxed voices and took their stances. He wanted to say something but there was no time. A significant number of monsters had come running from different directions. The Kurun was a monster that looked like a combination of a monkey and a wolf. Ark relaxed a bit after confirming the Kurun's information. They were only level 200. Although he was surprised that there were a dozen of them, without the dark attribute bonus he would still be able to handle them by himself.

"Okay Lariette-nim, please buff me!"

"Yes! Heavenly Light, Immortal Aura, Pure Sword!"

Lariette's buffs increased his various stats.

"Now, you will be sliced in an instant. Elemental sword, Fire attribute!"

The sword was engulfed in flames when he used the skill.

Ark's body then shot like an arrow towards the Kurun.

Flash-!

The Kurun screamed as they were suddenly wrapped in flames. Ark used the momentum to continuously attack until the Kurun's health had decreased by half.

'Okay, this is enough to deal with them.'

Ark smiled with satisfaction. Of course, Ark's health has decreased after attacking the Kurun. But then Lariette used recovery magic and a situation he couldn't predict occurred. Some of the Kurun who had been attacking Ark shrieked and turned to attack her.

'What the? Why all of a sudden.....whoops!'

Ark suddenly realised what was happening. It was a familiar situation for anyone who played online games. Numerical numbers for a monster's 'Fury' existed. If two users beat up the same monster, the system would attack the one who dealt more damage. There was one exception.

Recovery magic. Although the magic didn't deal direct damage to the monster, it's aggro gauge would increase considerably. Therefore, warriors in the party would have to time the use of 'Provocation' to coincide with the moment a priest used recovery magic. The most important part of fighting in a group was 'aggro management.' Ark had spent a year soloing so he never got the hang of it. Occasionally he fought with Roco but the rehabilitation members were there to tank.

"Kyaaak, please help me!"

"Huk, move it! Hiik!"

Ark rushed towards Lariette and Buksil who were in a crisis. Buksil was a merchant and Lariette just changed jobs so both of their health decreased. In fact, the Holy Knight had less recovery magic than a priest and were inferior in combat compared to warriors. But they had higher combat capabilities than a priest and could use magic to recover. Since it was the best profession in the Holy attribute series, the Innocence Knight received bonus stats based on their reputation. So although she was level 160, her actual stats were over level 200. But the problem was that she had originally been a magician.

She was wearing a cloth robe..... Since she had been in the Dawn Blade guild, it was a pretty good magic item but it had low defense. She was also inexperienced in

melee combat. When the Kurun ran up to her, she was too busy escaping to counterattack.

“T-this is.....Dedric, use taunt to disperse their attention!”

“Eh? Understood. Ya, you bastards, over here!”

Two Kurun rushed towards Dedric after he used taunt. Dedric flapped his wings and tried to run away.....but he could not. Dedric who had gained weight gasped as he flapped his wings and staggered after being hit in the back of the head.

.....Ah, he really was playing around.

“Dammit! Razak, take your defensive stance and protect both of them!”

Clack clack clack, clack clack clack clack!

Razak’s fat bones clattered as he ran forward. Even though Razak gained some weight, he was still better than Dedric. He was a bit slow but managed to get in front of them in time. Thanks to that, Lariette and Buksil didn’t collapse. But Razak couldn’t block all of the Kurun’s attacks even in his defensive stance. Once again Dedric and Razak weren’t able to deal with monsters higher than them. Razak was around level 150 after evolving while Dedric was only level 130. His summons were able to fight with level 300 monsters due to a combination play that they perfected through many trial and errors with Ark. They would just die if Ark wasn’t there. It was even worse once their flesh became plump.

‘Dammit.....of all times to be fat.....!’

Ark cursed as he gave up on the Kurun with 50% health and ran towards them.

“Ma-Master, please help!”

Dedric rolled on the ground like a ball of fur and called for help. Ark snatched Dedric and instantly used ‘Dark Dance.’ He moved like a ghost and used the chain skill of Dark Blade and Dark Strike on the Kurun. Despite the intense and continuous attacks pushing the Kurun back, the situation became even more bleak.

His pets, Lariette and Buksil were all in a critical condition. Ark also only had 50% health left after attacking the enemy. On the other hand, the Kurun had their health decreased by Flash but none of them had died yet. The ones with low health retreated and started throwing stones.

'I can narrow the distance and attack with Flash and then retreat using Dark Dance but.....'

Ark started to realise how unstable his party was. Buksil couldn't help in battles in the wilderness but he was good at luring monsters in dungeons to the desired place. However, having too many enemies in a wide open place like this turned out to be a weakness of their group. Ark wasn't a warrior so he couldn't wear heavy armour with high defense. 낮다. So he had to reduce damage in fights by evading. But he couldn't use those methods if he had to protect people. If he avoided the attacks then it might hit Buksil and Lariette. That was why he needed a warrior in the party!

'Damn, I have no choice but to hold on.'

Ark took out most of the flying stones with Riposte. During that time Lariette had recovered her health to 60% using recovery magic.

"Lariette-nim, please concentrate your recovery magic on Razak from now on. Razak, use your defensive stance to protect Lariette and Buksil. Hold out for a minute!"

Clack clack clack, clack clack clack clack!

Razak held out his shield.

"Sprint!"

Ark shot off like an arrow through the flying stones. Then he used Flash on the Kurun as soon as he entered in range. Once, twice, three times.....his mana was running out by the Kurun started collapsing one by one.

"Now it is time to finish this. Blessing of the sea!"

Ark used Adelaine's Necklace to restore his mana and once again used Flash. He exterminated the remaining Kurun after using Flash a few more times.

"Huk huk huk, I barely won."

Ark gasped as he ran out of breath.

After checking his health, he saw that he only had 5% left.

Since Lariette used her recovery magic, Razak wouldn't have been able to hold out if the Kurun concentrated their attacks on him. Therefore Ark took most of the attacks by the stones while using Flash.

When it was over, Lariette and Buksil came running over to him.

“Phew, the crisis is over.”

“I’m sorry. We were just a hindrance.....”

“No, it’s okay. Let’s take a break first. We don’t know when a monster will appear again so we should restore our health and mana when there is a chance.”

Ark started to set up a camp. Both Ark and Lariette had run out of mana.

‘We had such difficulty against a group of level 200 monsters.....’

Ark sneaked a peek at Dedric and Razak who were lying on the ground. Dedric and Razak both realised that they had made mistakes. Ark became annoyed at the sight but just shook his head.

‘No, there is a more fundamental problem.’

Yes, he knew that neither Dedric and Razak would be able to handle dozens of Kurun just yet. Nevertheless, the reason they struggled so much and almost died was because they had to protect Buksil and Lariette. If it was just Buksil then he didn’t need to worry that much. But now there were two of them. The situation was different. Ark needed to concentrate on attacking while protecting those two. It was a significant burden on Ark who was not a warrior and couldn’t wear heavy armour.

‘This is a surprisingly serious problem. There were level 300 monsters in the wilderness and now level 200 monsters suddenly appeared. This means that most of the monsters move in groups. If there is a dozen at the beginning of the forest, that number will probably increase as we move further in. If there is more than a dozen then I won’t be able to handle it.’

The same was true for Razak. If they attacked only Ark then he could handle it, but if they concentrated on Lariette and Buksil then Razak would only be able to last for 1~2 minutes.

‘There must be a way.....’

Ark blew out a sigh while looking serious. After worrying about it for a long time, he clenched his teeth and made up his mind.

‘Yes, it really can’t be helped.’

“Lariette-nim.”

Ark went over to Lariette who was still restoring her mana. After a moment of hesitating, he opened his mouth.

"I think it is dangerous if we enter the forest blindly. If there are a lot of monsters then I won't be able to block everything. Buksil is a merchant but since Lariette-nim changed to a knight, if you raise your defense then it will decrease my burden by a bit."

"I know that too.....but I only have items for mages."

"I know."

Ark nodded and stuck his hand into his bag. That's right. If Lariette wore armour and raised her defense a little bit then it would decrease the burden on Ark. She was still lacking close combat skills, but if her defense rose then her would be decreased slower. However.....even if he was determined, his body didn't want to move. Cold sweat dripped down his face as his hand remained in his bag. But Ark was a man of his word!

"Please receive this!"

Ark closed his eyes tightly and took out an item. Lariette and Buksil looked at Ark strangely while he was sweating.

Battered Half-Plate

Armour type: Iron armour

Defense power: 0

Durability: 0/0

Weight: 10

User restriction: Level 100 and over

The half-plate armour can be seen everywhere. This one is so old that mould has started to form on it. No matter how great the craftsmen, they would not be able to repair this armour. You can attempt to sell it but you probably won't receive that much.

It was an item that clearly wasn't great once checked in the information window. The gloves, shoes and shoulder blades that were taken out afterwards was also similar to the armour.

‘What the? He hesitated so much to give me items like these?’

Those were Lariette’s and Buksil’s thoughts.

‘Huk, if I sell all of these then I would get at least 1 gold.....if I sell it as a set then I might be able to get 4 gold.....’

Tears gathered at the thought of 4 gold flying away. 4 gold was 40,000 won. It was like grabbing a shovel and digging for 3 hours. One thousand won might appear. Of course, Lariette was a special person to Ark. But that was different. If Ark was just playing for fun then he wouldn’t care about a few japtem.....no, even magic items wouldn’t matter. However, Ark had a definite goal. To make money!

Thanks to that one goal, he couldn’t even afford to lose 1 copper. It was a big decision for him to give up some japtem.

“Yes.....t-thank you.”

Lariette couldn’t bear to say no and received the armour set. In fact, the cloth armour that Lariette was wearing had pretty good defense. Alan had spent money and obtained it for her. The cloth armour had better defense than the armour that Ark gave her. A higher quality! But something called profession attributes existed in New World. In other words, if it wasn’t restricted to profession then a magician could also wear metal armour. However, there would be a job penalty inflicted and they would not receive the full defense. That was why magicians wore cloth equipment despite having a lower defense. If knights wore a robe then they would have a 40% penalty in defense. But the items Ark gave was metal armour. It was a trivial item but it would be able to increase the defense.

‘That’s it. It is valuable but my burden so lessen a little bit.’

But Ark miscalculated. Once she wore armour, Lariette seemed to mistakenly think that she was a knight. When the monsters appeared, she stepped forward while holding her japtem sword. However, her battle sense was really bad.

“I’ll help you!”

“Oh, no.....it is not necessary.....”

“Ack!”

“Lariette-nim?”

Lariette blindly swung her sword and instead of hitting the target, she swung to wildly and fell onto the ground. So Ark had to stop fighting and rush to protect her. But that wasn't all. Because she was a magician for so long, she didn't understand how to fight as a knight. When Ark swung his sword, she would also swing hers and almost damaged him.....it was truly a disaster. At least Lariette would focus on recovery when wearing a robe but now she was too busy trying to fight to support Ark. Therefore every battle was difficult. Ark was worn out. But it wasn't possible to approach and tell her off.

"I'm sorry. I haven't improved have I?"

What could he possibly say to such a lovely face? Ark smiled painfully while sweating.

"Ah, no. You've worked hard."

".....My satiety went down to 60% because I moved too much."

".....Eat this rice."

There was nothing more to say. When the battle started, Ark had to try not to die and when it ended he was forced to feed them. But now there were 5 mouths. He had to make servings for 5 people everything a fight ended so his ingredients were quickly running out. There were many times when Ark had to skip meals to go around and gather ingredients. Furthermore, once the situation repeated then Dedric started acting up.

'Eh? It is strange. Normally Master would've already punched me so why hasn't he said anything?'

The plump Dedric finally snapped his fingers.

'Aha, now I get it. That Master, his weakness is that girl. It is embarrassing that he is so attached to Alan's woman. And now he can't tell me and Razak off. Huhuhu, this is a chance to pay back all my sorrow! I'm going to show him how fearful I can be!'

When it was time for a break, Dedric transformed into a young boy and stuck close to Lariette. Then he started to harass Ark just like a mother-in-law.

"Hey, Master. What is this? I told you I wanted to eat meat dishes!"

He just kicked the pot and complained when more servings were cooked.

'How dare this child act like this.....!'

Furthermore, it wasn't only Dedric. Buksil also started acting cocky once Ark was compliant.

"Ark-nim, somehow you're not appearing too good on the screen lately? Was the exertion too much for you?"

Buksil placed his pig foot on Ark who was kneeling down to boil the soup and chattered on.

'Do these bastards think they can treat me like this?'

Curses rose in his throat. His heart really wanted to kill something right now. But he couldn't curse and strike at a young boy and a pig in front of Lariette.....no, he just had to fix the habit stealthily.

'No. It's not something I can endure!'

So his happy trip had turned into hell in a few days.

Act 6: My Fair Lady

'Ah, no.....it is impossible anymore.'

Ark's patience was slowly reaching its limit. As Lariette became worse in the battles, Dedric started openly annoying them. He was still collecting ingredients for their meals.....

-Thanks to the player, your pets were able to eat comfortably and have become satisfied.

<Affection +2>

Wasn't it understandable that the message window rubbed salt in his wounds? Ark's stress continued to accumulate.

'Is there another way?' There must be a way to make Lariette more useful in battles and to fix that child Dedric's bad behaviour! If I can't find a way then I really will die.'

Ark groaned and glanced at Lariette. In fact, she was very difficult for Ark. It was difficult because she was a woman. He couldn't openly tell her off, but he was suffering and almost died because of her.

'Should I close my eyes just once and try to say something?'

He thought about it many times but just ended up going in circles. It wasn't just another woman, this was Lariette. He was so natural with Roco that he would have no problem telling her.

'Hah.....that reminds me of Lee Myung-ryong Teacher.....'

Ark thought of Lee Myung-ryong. There were a considerable number of policewomen present at the gym. But Lee Myung-ryong didn't treat them any different from the other members of his team. Well, if he was bothered by acting violent towards women then he couldn't be a SWAT team leader.

"If a woman wants to be treated nicely then she should stay at home doing laundry!"

That was Lee Myung-ryong's thoughts. Of course the policewomen didn't express their dissatisfaction. If they didn't train properly at the gym then they would get yelled at.

'Eh? Wait?'

Ark lifted his head at the thought.

'That's right, why didn't I think of that?'

Ark had found a way to solve all his problems. He stood up and went to Lariette.

"Lariette-nim, I have something to say."

"Please say it."

"Lariette-nim is now a knight. Isn't Innocence Knight similar to Holy Knight? Then holy magic is used more as support. Learning how to fight with swords and shields is more important than holy magic. Didn't Lariette become caught up in the fights because you enjoyed it?"

"Yes....."

Lariette replied in a small voice. Yes, Lariette already knew about it from watching Alan. So she learned combat skills and approached monsters because she wanted to be useful for Ark.

"But you've spent a lot of time as a magician so you can't just suddenly master close combat. So let's focus on supporting the battles using recovery magic while you slowly learn the basic combat skills step by step. If you like then I would be happy to teach you the basics."

"Ark-nim will teach me?"

"Yes. I'll teach you everything from using a sword to moving in combat."

Lariette wavered for a moment before nodding.

".....Let's give it a try."

A smile formed on Ark's mouth. Yes, if she didn't know how to fight properly then just teach her. Besides, Ark and Lariette were now mentor and disciple. He didn't know how to speak to a woman, but if it was a disciple then couldn't he say everything he wanted to?

'I don't know how good it'll be but it is better than moving forward blindly.'

Ark brought Lariette to a suitable place and indicated.

"Now, let's begin immediately. First swing your sword 1,000 times!"

"Huh? 1, 000 times?"

"Other warriors have swung their swords since they were level 1. If you have such basics then you can fight against level 200 monsters. If Lariette-nim wants to reach that standard then you need to swing that much every day."

Ark was relentless once it became a mentor and disciple relationship.

"I'll come back once you've done 1,000 swings. Then we will follow up with defense training."

After Ark made Lariette train, he approached Dedric, Razak and Buksil who were at the camp. He grinned widely and opened his mouth.

"Hey, everyone follow me."

"Huk, what, what?" Surely you aren't taking us to a dark place to beat us up?"

"Beat up? It's training. Lariette-nim is working hard to become stronger while you guys are just lazing around eating rice. Since we have to stay here a couple of days to

train Lariette-nim, I'll also make you guys do training. But everyone has already graduated from the basics so I guess it's time for sparring."

"N-no, I don't want to!"

"I will not. Why should a merchant train...."

"Noisy, just come with me!"

Ark dragged his pets and Buksil into the forest. Then.....he used the pretence of sparring to deal indiscriminate violence for a long time. 2 hours later, the faces of his pets and Buksil were completely swollen so Ark brought training (?) to an end and they returned to the camp. Lariette who had been brandishing her sword said with surprise.

"Omo, your faces...."

"It was training. After seeing Lariette-nim, those guys were so motivated that they wanted to train as well."

Buksil's face contorted with Ark lied about training. But when Ark smiled and elbowed him, Buksil instantly nodded with sweat on his face. The effect of 2 hours of education appeared.

'Ah, how refreshing! As expected, I have to break them to teach them manners.'

Ark was so refreshed that he felt like he lost 10 years. For the next few days, Ark stayed in that place and focused on training. Fortunately, Lariette learned her 'Sword Mastery' and 'Heavy Defense' skills while Buksil and his pets lost all the weight they gained. As a bonus, they once again listened to him after the discipline.

'Huhuhu, I should've done this sooner.....once again the control is in my hands.'

After Lariette got the hang of basic postures, Ark immediately began the next part of the training.

"Now, I'll be showing you the first party formation so please watch carefully. Dedric, Razak!"

"Yes, Master!"

Clack clack clack!

The disciplined Dedric replied while floating.

"The formations will range from plan A to D depending on the command. Go!"

Ark led his summons and began a battle against a group of Kurun. Lariette's eyes widened. In fact, she hadn't understood anything while watching Ark in the previous battles. The timing to evade a hit, sword angles and footwork! Everything was standard techniques, but she hadn't been able to understand it since she wasn't a trained warrior. But now she had a high level of knowledge thanks to Ark teaching her battle skills. In addition, she also learned a lot about party cooperation with the summons.

'It is a level higher! Now I know how much of a hindrance I've been to Ark-nim. But he never expressed any of it.....he was afraid of embarrassing me so he taught me combat skills.'

Lariette now looked at him with a lot of respect. Anyway, Ark had given her a textbook which explained the standard pets formation. After the training, Lariette's skills were around a level 30 warrior. So Ark instructed her properly using his pets. In fact, in the past he never would've imagined commanding her. But after they became a mentor and disciple, it wasn't that difficult teaching her things. No, it was to the extent that he didn't understand why he hesitated so much before.

'Yes, she's just another person I know.'

Lariette was no longer considered a 'guest' so he didn't have to be so careful anymore. It was only traveling with a colleague. If that's the case.....was there any reason to keep on feeding her? Once the relationship was established, Ark revealed his true colours.

"Lariette-nim, the Dawn Blade guild has been dismantled right? You don't have to worry while accompanying me, but one day you'll be travelling alone so you'll require skills to take care of yourself. Among them, the most essential thing to learn is cooking. Learning how to collect ingredients will also be helpful towards cooking later on. I'll teach you. Buksil, I'll also teach you to collect ingredients."

"Huh? But I have the mission to record Ark-nim....."

Buksil said in surprise but shut up when Ark shook his head. So Ark forcibly taught him how to forage ingredients. Since there were mainly high grade ingredients in the Netherworld, there was a lot of failures. But after a couple of days of suffering, Lariette and Buksil managed to learn the Ingredient Foraging skill.

"Kyaaa, I've learned it. Ingredient Foraging!"

“Congratulations. But now’s the important part. We need to increase your proficiency in order to take advantage of the skill properly. You will always be looking for ingredients except when fighting.”

So Ark forced the collection of ingredients to Buksil and Lariette from now on.

‘Phew, now I can concentrate on raising Leather Extraction and Butchery instead of collecting ingredients.’

That was the reason why he forced ingredient foraging on the two of them. He had to raise Leather Extraction and Butchery in advance to be able to obtain the skin and heart of the undead. But he had been so busy trying to feed the five of them that he had no time to raise the skills.

‘It will now be a pleasant journey!’

Therefore all the stress he had built up flew away. But they encountered a new ordeal shortly after they resumed the journey.

“A-1 plan! Lariette-nim, attack from behind!”

Ark was allowing Lariette to practice the battle formations. When the A-1 plan was implemented Ark, Lariette and his summons attacked from 4 directions. Then the special Kurun that was twice as big as the others wasn’t able to last and collapsed. And it dropped an item.

Resilient Shield made of Garam Wood (Magic)

Armour type: Medium Shield

Defense: 250 (+40)

Durability: 320/400

Weight: 25

User Restriction: Knights level 150 and more

The shield covered in Garam wood is stronger than steel. Garam wood is taken from a sacred tree and is used in a lot of sacred items. If used to create a wooden armour, a holy aura will protect the wearer.

<Option: Stamina +10, Wisdom +20, Defense +40>

<Special Option: Amplification of holy magic by 10%>

“A magic item!”

Ark’s eyes gleamed. But the performance of the item was a problem. It was a knight only shield and it also amplified holy magic. When Lariette decided to accompany Ark, there was an agreement that all items would go to him. But just by looking at this item, it was clearly an item that Lariette had to use. Even if they reached an agreement, the shield would definitely be coveted.

‘But it isn’t just a magic item. Shields that have a special option is rare! It will earn at least 1,000,000 won on the auction site so I can’t just concede it! But it is a lot better than all the japtem I’ve collected.....’

Ark struggled and avoided Lariette’s gaze until he finally lifted the shield. He couldn’t give up 1,000,000 won even if it pricked his conscious. Then Ark suddenly had a brilliant idea.

‘.....I might be able to avoid any damage and still get credit.’

“Lariette-nim, do you need this shield?”

“Huh? No, I.....”

Although Lariette used ambiguous language, she couldn’t take her eyes off the shield. Ark made a worried gesture before speaking in a serious voice.

“In fact, it’s been weighing on my mind. Even though you’ve changed your occupation, you don’t have any knight exclusive items. I only gave you japtem.”

“.....I already decided to concede all items to Ark-nim.”

“But if such an item dropped then it should definitely go to you.”

“But I’d feel sorry....”

Even though Lariette was glad, she still felt sorry. Then Ark muttered something.

“But do you know about the Baran’s trading methods?”

“Huh? Baran’s trading methods?”

“We should barter items of similar value. For example, Lariette doesn’t need the magician items anymore so you can barter with those items. Yes, we should do that.”

Buksil who had been watching from the sidelines felt his face heat up. He noticed the intent in Ark's words. He was offering to trade the shield for an item with equal value of Lariette's! Buksil was distressed at such a dirty method. But Ark was resolute.

'I might be embarrassed now, but I would regret giving up money forever!'

Ark decided not to be worried about Lariette any longer. Of course, Lariette was still his ideal woman. Although he was more comfortable after making her train, his heart would still feel sick if she cried. But Ark braced himself.

'What have I been doing so far? No, wake up!'

Ark didn't know what was in Lariette's heart. Although he felt a strange expectation at one time, Ark wouldn't accept it even if Lariette confessed her love. That was because Ark already loved one person more than anybody else. He devoted his whole life and love to that person! It wasn't some cheap feeling. He sincerely felt like that.

My love, my life, my past and future. My eternal fair lady!

'Mother.....yes, the person I love most in this world is my mother. How can I feel shame if that money will pay for my mother's medical bills or for slightly better food? I would do even worse things if it is for my mother!'

He was not ashamed. Everything was for his mother! That was one reason why Ark could act so dignified while behaving like this. But Lariette's reaction was unexpected.

"Ah, that's fair enough. Yes, I would feel sorry so let's exchange it for my magician items. So we do this if any other knight items drop in the future?"

"Huh? Ah, yes....."

Ark was puzzled by her reaction. In fact, Ark's behaviour didn't seem that good to Lariette. But she didn't hate that attitude. When she was a part of Dawn Blade, Alan had been overly hospitable to her. At some point it became a burden and she decided to leave Dawn Blade. But Ark was different from Alan. He didn't treat her well just because she was a woman. In reality she was a beauty so nobody had ever treated her like Ark did. So Ark's actions in the last week was refreshing for her. The talk about beauties being attracted to bad boys wasn't unfounded. Anyway, Lariette exchanged her wand for Ark's shield.

"Then shall we continue?"

Ark smiled pleasantly after the transaction finished. Ark didn't just 'move on.'

"Buksil and Lariette, please move over there and gather ingredients."

When the battle finished, he instantly forced Buksil and Lariette to raise their experience. Both of them ended up with sore backs from bending over to pick up ingredients. Ark's bags were moderately full from their efforts so he said firmly.

"Continue collecting ingredients until your proficiency has increased."

'Do we have to live like this until it reaches intermediate?'

Lariette was scared by the thought. On the other hand, Buksil was frightened for another reason.

'If the bag becomes full then I'm going to end up like my younger brothers....!'

But Ark was quite satisfied with the situation.

'Hehehe, I really needed to do this. Now my stress has disappeared!'

Ark exploited the two people while entering the Forest of Life.

Kwa kwa kwa kwang!

"Fire wall!"

A barrier of flames erupted along the trajectory that Jewel pointed towards. They weren't simple flames like a candle. The fire exploded from the ground with tremendous pressure! The dozens of Nakujuk was engulfed in flames and 'burned.'

"Piercing arrow!"

Duke shot an arrow towards the Nakujuk through the wall of flames. It was a piercing skill that could only be used on steel arrows! The steel penetrated through the bodies of the Nakujuk and dealt tremendous damage. Jewel and Duke were pioneers and took care of 3~4 at once. Magicians and archers had a lot of wide damage skills so they showed their full power when there were plenty of enemies. The only drawback was that they specialized in long distance attacks and had low defense.

"Steel barrier!"

But the warriors used a shield skill and stepped in front of them. Therefore Jewel and Duke had plenty of leeway to maximize their skills. However.....there were too many of them. They had killed more than a hundred but the enemy numbers did not decrease at all. It felt like they've only lifted a spoonful of sand in a desert.

"Damn, what the hell?"

"That Ark didn't appear at all....."

"Don't tell me he tricked us and went the opposite direction?"

Jewel muttered. After receiving the information, they had chased after Ark for a few days. Not long ago Jewel's group finally crossed the northern mountain. Of course, even that wasn't easy. The northern mountain was the one near the Abyss of Despair. They used skyrays the first time they went there, but now they decided to cross on foot. The monsters on the northern mountain were no problem. It was the unbearable terrain of the northern mountain.....the ground, walls and ceilings were all covered in the sharp stalactites, making it difficult to grab and climb the rock cliff. They weren't able to cross the terrain using conventional methods. But Jewel's group didn't give up even despite being stabbed by the brambles.

"There is definitely a way to pass here somewhere."

"If that bastard Ark managed to cross then we should as well!"

Everybody was resolute towards getting revenge on Ark! They were able to use their vengefulness as an energy source and crossed the mountain. But none of them could've imagined the suffering that was waiting beyond the mountain. Was Ark waiting for them? No. Instead the group of red Nakujuk were gathered.

"Intruders!"

"Seize them, the Baran have clearly sent spies!"

"Huk, what is this?" Retreat!"

Jewel's group panicked and ran away. However, the northern mountain was blocking the path behind them. Why was there a group of Nakujuk instead of Ark? After a while, they realised that Ark wasn't there and he had led them towards the Nakujuk just like before.

"No, I can't die like the previous time. Lure them into the valley!"

They didn't know the circumstances inside the Abyss of Despair but this time was different. They might seemed stupid sometimes but they were still pioneers. Jewel immediately judged the situation and lured them into the valley. A traditional tactic of dealing with a lot of enemies was to use a narrow passage to bottleneck them. So even though there were hundreds of Nakujuk, there only faced around twenty at one time. Jewel stopped the Nakujuk's rush using warriors at the front with support from ranged attacks. So there were able to deal with a hundred monsters without receiving much damage. But Jewel knew that it was only a temporary solution.

'It will be the end once my mana runs out. We need to find a way to penetrate the siege and run away. It isn't possible to come here and not kill Ark!'

Jewel bit her lips until it became bloody and started thinking. Then Duke exclaimed with black pupils.

"Jewel, their leader is near the valley entrance!"

It was the ranger's advanced skill 'Hawk Eyes' which could see everything in a range of 200 metres! While looking around to determine the number of enemies, Duke had spotted the large figure of the leader.

"The distance?"

"Behind those troops over there. Level 350."

"Okay, this is a chance to improve the situation!"

Jewel's eyes lit up. In a battle between users and monsters, the existence of a leader was important. If the leader was killed then its troops would be in a state of panic for a while. Their morale would fall and their formation collapse. If that happened then it would be possible to penetrate the Nakujuk's encirclement.

"If we kill him than those guys will fall into a panic!"

"Understood, let's penetrate the enemy with the triangle formation. The goal is 50 metres from the entrance!"

"Let's go!"

Kwa kwa kwa kwang!

The warriors transitioned from defense to attack and pushed through the Nakujuk. Jewel and Duke used penetrating attacks while the warriors used their

shields to push the Nakujuk away. Suddenly the only enemy in front of Jewel's group was the elite leader. He was a giant with huge axes in both hands.

"Don't pay attention to the followers and focus your attacks on the leader!"

"Ohhhhh, Heroic Strike!"

The ten group members surrounded the leader and enthusiastically used their skills. Although the elite monster possessed incredible strength and stamina, under the concentrated attacks his health quickly fell. Then Duke's precise shot hit his knee and he kneeled down.

"Ugh, u-unbelievable.....!"

"At last!"

Biiiiik-

The warriors ran up for the final assault and swung their swords. Suddenly there was a sharp cry from the sky as a black eagle descended towards the battlefield. At the same time, a flash of light fell towards the leader. There was an intense shock wave that pushed the warriors back.

"Ugh, what, what the.....?"

"Who is that? A person fell."

Jewel's group lifted their weapons. The form of a person appeared amongst the cloud of dust. It was a man with red hair wearing a white mask!

'What is this guy? An enemy? But somehow the atmosphere.....?'

Jewel couldn't determine how to handle it.

"You're the people from the Abyss of Despair. You did well."

The Red Man gazed at Jewel's group and nodded.

"How about it? Would you like to join hands with me? If you work for me then I'll promise a payment."

"What? Join hands? What are you saying after suddenly appearing?"

"Or.....would you like to die here?"

The Red Man moved his hands and gestured around. Jewel looked around dumbly. Jewel hadn't realised, but the Nakujuk had stopped attacking once he appeared. The leader had also stopped and wore a look of surprise. So the Red Man must have a lot of influence on the Nakujuk clan. If they rejected his request then it was obvious what would happen.

"Who.....Who are you?"

Jewel rolled her eyes and asked with a dissatisfied expression. Then there was an amused look in the eyes revealed by the mask.

"I'm a user. The same as you."

Act 7: Galgin Clan's Disaster

Kuaaaang!

A loud roar rattled the forest. It looked like a Kurun but with 3 heads, a monster with 5 tails called the 'Chimera-Kurometin.' Level 250. There was a group of 4 or 5 monsters. They had high defense and attack so they were the toughest opponent he's faced so far, but he had become accustomed to their attack patterns after fighting them a few times. Although it was a little difficult in the daytime, once he had the dark attribute bonus then Ark could easily take care of it. But Ark didn't use his skills and just raised his voice.

"Plan A-3. Lariette-nim, lure two and take them out."

"Huh? Yes! Holy bolt, Holy bolt!"

Lariette attacked two of them with holy magic. However, only one of the monsters moved and chased after her. Then Dedric who had been sitting on her shoulder started lecturing her.

"How many times do I have to say it? Are you stupid? Distance is important when you are trying to lure! Even if you too far away when you 'taunt' then it won't work properly!"

"B-but it's too scary....."

"What? Are you kidding right now? Are you a princess? You're afraid of hitting a monster while holding a sword? You're too much trouble. Are you scared of hitting

with your sword? Is that what you're saying? Don't use magic! Only use your sword and shield!"

"U-understood."

"Ah, what are you doing? Move closer to the monster! Sword, sword! Shield, shield!"

Dedric continually harassed Lariette.

'That guy.....he's acting like this again. Well, that's why I entrusted it to him.'

Ark gave a wry smile after hearing the noisy Dedric. He had trained Lariette for a few days. In the meantime, Lariette had improved a lot as a knight. She could use recovery magic and attack the monsters from the rear. However, she still hadn't met Ark's standards.

'Well, using a sword and shield is not something that can be learned overnight.....'

Yes, Lariette had the same issue as Isyuram. If she started the game as a knight, then she would've naturally learned the necessary skills to use a sword and shield. However, she suddenly became a completely different class at level 160 with no previous skills and knowledge. She could only use the holy magic exclusive skills of an Innocence Knight. Common skills such as Sword Mastery would have to be taught by mercenary NPCs after they were paid. But Ark was kind (?). After teaching her some tips, she was able to learn some warrior exclusive skills.

'She has to adapt to fighting in a party in order to truly become useful.'

Of course, Lariette had participated in party teamwork with the Dawn Blade members. But her role was different as she was a magician. In addition, the Dawn Blade members always hunted with dozens of people. Even if one or two people failed in their roles then it wouldn't be a problem. In a small party with 3~4 people, even one person could affect the battle. Fortunately, Lariette had a clear head.

'I remember the basic plans.....but as expected, there are numerous variables in an actual battle. I have to have a broader view in order to learn every formation.'

So Ark determined what he should train Lariette in. Ark taught her how to use a shield, Razak tips on dealing with a shield and sword, and the tactical combat was left to Dedric to teach Lariette.

...It was an excellent choice.

In fact, Dedric had become slightly depressed after Ark succeeded in re-education and forcing him on a diet. But after receiving the number 2 position and being entrusted with the 'tactics,' his mood and loyalty rose once again. His chatter was also more bearable than before and didn't annoy Ark as much.

"Oh, it's really crazy. Are you stupid? How many times do I have to tell you? Didn't I tell you not to move too far when luring? There may be other monsters in the vicinity. Will you shoulder the responsibility if other monsters attack and the party dies? Invite the monster and lead them around a small area!"

Dedric once again spoke roughly to a woman.

"You idiot, I told you not to do that! You have to maintain a distance that allows you to use recovery magic on your allies! Are you going to just blindly use magic? Is that acceptable? Your group might end up eaten. Ayu, hey Razak, time for a demonstration!"

Clack clack clack clack, daeng kang!

Razak pushed the Kurometin with his shield. Dedric nodded and said.

"Did you see? Take one step and then push! Okay?"

"Huk huk huk, u-understood. I'll give it a try."

"Do it right this time."

Dedric picked his nose and continued harassing her.

'It is crude but more effective than me teaching her.'

Thanks to that, Lariette gradually learned her role in the group.

'Now, should I finish it for the moment since Lariette is tired?'

"Dedric, Razak, gather all of them in one place."

Clack clack clack clack!

"Okay! Watch carefully trainee. I'll show you how to lure!"

Dedric displayed dazzling skills and lured the Kurometin straight towards Ark. Razak also gathered around the monsters and used Shield Stroke. It was like dressing up a table for Ark.....and he continuously used Flash.

Kwa kwa kwa kwang!

The flash of light moved around the Kurometin like a spider web and their health gradually decreased. When the Kurometin fell into a critical condition, Ark and Lariette finished it off. After the Kurometin died, Ark commanded in a hurry.

“Radun, swallow the items quickly!”

Ssak ssak ssak ssak!

Radun shot off like an arrow and swallowed the items without checking it. Meanwhile Ark didn't relax and kept on looking around.

‘Phew.....fortunately it hasn't appeared yet.....’

Ark gave a sigh of relief. Then a cross pattern appeared on top of Lariette's head who screamed.

“Another level up! Kyaaa, I also got the ‘Shield Block’ skill!”

But the severe tactics training continued even now.

“What's the point of an uproar when you made so many mistakes? The techniques are not as easy as you thought!”

Dedric declared sharply causing Lariette to flinch and close her mouth. Then, Ark smiled and said in a friendly voice.

“No. In my view you've gotten a lot better. Although you still have the habit of relying on magic in a fight, if you fix that then you'll be a proper knight.”

“It's all thanks to Ark-nim.”

Lariette blushed at Ark's compliment.

“Bah, you're still a shameful knight. You're not there yet!”

“Stop it, Dedric. I can see that your skill handling a sword is very good.”

Lariette's face had darkened at Dedric's words and now it brightened after Ark spoke. It was the carrot and stick! That was the secret reason behind Lariette's quick progress.

“Let's take a break and recover our mana.”

Ark made a campsite and collected the corpses of the Kurometin. He took out the 'Butcher's Knife' and began to separate the meat and leather. After finishing those actions, Ark surveyed the area with a worried eye like when Radun collected the items.

'Damn, I never thought a monster could make me so nervous.'

Annoyance showed in Ark's eyes. It had been a week after they left the valley village.....they finally arrived at their destination, the Forest of Life yesterday evening. If it was just Ark, he would've arrived at the destination a long time ago. But Lariette was an office worker so she couldn't access the game during the day. Whenever she disconnected, he would make a campsite and spend the time hunting in the vicinity.

'Well, there is no urgency at the moment.'

It was taking longer than he expected but he wasn't that impatient. There were many reasons why and one of them was that the monsters here gave quite good experience.

Character Name	Ark	Race	Human
Alignment		Good +400	
Fame	9,125 (+500)	Level	269
Profession		Dark Walker	
Title		Cat Knight, Caretaker of the Abandoned, Jackson's Hero, Great Adventurer	
Health	4,111 (+150)	Mana	4,250
Spiritual Power	200	Strength	543 (+28)
Agility	703 (+55)	Stamina	773 (+20)
Wisdom	107 (+10)	Intelligence	822
Luck	103 (+30)	Flexibility	107
Art of Communication	46	Affection	152 (+10)
Resilience	305		

Special stat: Knowledge of Ancient Relics	138
* Equipment item effects	
Guardian Armour of the Merpeople: Water Attribute Resistance +100%, Penalty based on water is nullified.	
Cat Paws (Gloves): Attack Speed +10%, Agility +15, Critical Hit +10%	
Raccoons Pith (Helmet): Agility + 10, Wisdom + 10	
* <King> Set effect: Strength + 10, Agility + 10, Stamina +10, Defense +20	
Warrior's Transcripts (Shoulder Blades): Strength + 3	
Wind Spirit's Boots (Shoes): Agility + 30, Movement Speed +30%, Attack Speed +10%, 'Slide' available	
Galgashi's Fur (Mantle): Cold resistance +100%, Agility +20, When health is less than 50%, 'Magic Protection' automatically activates.	
Adelaine's Necklace (Necklace): Defense + 40, Affection +10, 'Blessing of the Sea' available	
Resurrecting Spirit (Ring): Strength + 5, Mana recovery + 5%	
Rarukan's Ring (Ring): Agility + 10, Attack Speed +10%, Critical Hit +8%, 'Dark Protection' available	
Amulet of Vitality (Bracelet): Health + 50, Health recovers by 5 every 20 seconds	
Gladiator's Honour (Bracelet): Strength, Agility, Stamina +10, Fame +500, Sword-based Skill Growth +5%	
* All abilities will increase by 40% in the dark	
* You have the ability to hide in the darkness (20 minutes duration. Cancelled when you get into combat)	
* Resistance to Fear, Darkness, Blind, and Seduction spells is increased by 50%.	
* You can bring out the true abilities from all types of tools.	

* Shock absorption is increased by 20%.

* Poison resistance has increased by 50%.

* 10% increased attack and defense

He gained 13 levels in a week. Lariette could only play 6 hours a day but still managed to gain 8 levels to reach 170. In New World, there was a penalty on experience gained if there was a large level difference between party members, with the penalty depending on how much the difference is.

‘The number of monsters and experience is acceptable. The speed is similar to levelling up in a dungeon.’

Ark quite liked the Forest of Life. Except for one type of monster.....

-You have succeeded in gathering ‘Kurometin Leather’ using Leather Extraction.

Thanks to his steady efforts, his Leather Extraction skill had reached the intermediate level. But the success rate of leather extraction on level 250 monsters was only 5%.

The effect of ‘Sacred Branch’ raised it to 15%.

Although it was a habit, he hadn’t expected the result. However, Ark’s face had a rushed expression instead of the normal look of joy.

‘Huk, it is coming to take the soul away!’

Ark packed the leather in his bag and grabbed his sword. At that time, he heard the sound of rustling leaves coming from the forest.

‘That bastard, you were hiding nearby!’

Ark glared with blazing eyes filled with anger at the dark forest. After a while, he heard the rustling sound of something moving away. It was definitely that guy! The monster who made Ark’s blood tremble in fear!

‘I never thought there would be a tough monster like that.’

Ark had only seen it two or three times. But it was the first time Ark had sensed that the monster would be a threat to him. The monster was called the ‘Chimera=Bandit Fox.’

It was a thief fox..... Those guys hid themselves using 'Protective Colouration' and appeared out of nowhere to steal his items before running away. They had even managed to intercept him when Ark was holding the items. In addition, their speed was so fast that he wasn't able to catch them using 'Sprint.'

"There are also monsters like that...."

His obsession with the burglar fox was so much that even Dedric held his tongue. So Ark made sure that Radun swallowed the items as soon as the battle ended. Radun was responsible for collecting the items so it especially disliked the Bandit Fox.

'Damn!'

Ark cursed whenever he sensed them. Anyway, if he was careful then the Bandit Fox would have no chance of stealing his items. The problem was that there were ingredients scattered all over the Forest of Life. Just like its name, the Forest of Life was a place where lush greenery grew. There were a wide variety of plants that could be used as food ingredients.....and that was the real reason why he hated the Bandit Foxes. Even though Ark searched the Forest of Life, he only managed to collect 3~4 ingredients. Every time a food ingredient popped up, it would be devoured by the foxes.

'It is impossible to catch the Bandit Foxes inside this forest.....'

He had tried to catch them. However, whenever he got close they would use 'Protective Colouration' which was similar to Stealth. And the problem wouldn't be solved by catching one or two. Who knew how many thousands of Bandit Foxes there were?

'It is impossible. I just have to collect it first before he foxes discover it.'

"Okay, let's go. It is time for Ingredient Foraging."

Ark ordered while Buksil and Lariette stood up with a sigh.

"Now, Lariette-nim will search around here while Buksil will search to the north."

"But what if the thieves have already collected everything and we find nothing. I would rather use that time to search for the laboratory. The Forest of Life is quite wide so wouldn't it take a long time to walk around the whole thing?"

"You never know."

Ark replied in a stern voice to Buksil's complaint.

"There might be ingredients hard to collect because they're foxes."

"Hah.....I think we have enough ingredients....."

"Food is plentiful now but there is no guarantee what will happen in the future. Think about it. I've already faced a situation when I've been exhausted from hunger. But did I just give up? I can't let them take away what is ours. It is too vexing!"

"We're not like Ark-nim....."

Buksil murmured with dissatisfaction but started searching the forest when Ark glared at him.

"We have to scrape as much as possible!"

Ark used those reasons and forced the two of them into manual labour. But all they got for their efforts was back pain. How much time had passed?

"Kyaaa, what, what the? Huk, go away!"

Lariette screamed from a short distance away. Ark flinched and swung his sword in Lariette's direction. Then she came screaming out of the forest with something wrapped around her head.

"Hik, s-stop! Don't hit me!"

'Eh? That guy is.....?'

The person hanging onto Lariette was an acquaintance (?). It was an NPC resembling a bug. It was Reid, the Galgin peddler he rescued from the Predator the other day. Lariette had mistaken him for an insect type monster.

"Lariette-nim, wait a minute!"

Ark stood in front of Lariette and blocked her. Reid moved his head away and saw Ark.

"Y-you are?"

"It is Ark. We met once before."

"Oh, running into someone I know in a place like this.....God is really helping me. Help me!"

His eyes were brimming with tears as he spoke.

"Don't worry. I'm not going to attack anymore."

Ark looked at Lariette and smiled bitterly. The one who had turned pale with fear was Lariette. Of course someone like her would be scared of an insect like creature. In fact, it was the first time he had seen Lariette truly having an urge to kill. But Reid just shook his antennae and said.

"No, no. It's not that. My entire family is clan is about to die."

"Huh? Clan?"

Reid explained the situation while crying.

"You know that we are peddlers. When an adult starts peddling, they don't get to meet their family that often. So it a tradition to designate a place to travel to and meet once a month. The reason I was in the vicinity before was because this forest had been designated as the meeting place. Then.....then.....yesterday I've arrived at the meeting place and everybody was suffering."

"Suffering?"

"Yes, all of them are dying. I hastily made several medicines but it had no effect. It's obviously a mysterious disease. Although they are sick, they're still holding on to their lives..... So I started searching for people who could help. Do you have ways to treat such diseases? Middle earth should have advanced techniques to cure diseases. You're from middle earth."

"....."

Ark turned and looked at Lariette. It should be a technique similar to 'Disease Recovery.' After Lariette changed to an Innocence Knight, she happened to learn 'Disease Recovery.' But Lariette had an uneasy expression and said in a worried voice.

"Ah, Ark-nim. Are we really going to help this insect?"

Of course he would help. Why? In order to get a reward.

'Isn't Reid's family the Galgin clan of peddlers? Well, they might not have that much but I might be able to get some items for my summons from Reid.'

It was difficult to obtain items in the Netherworld. There were only two or three bartering shops in the valley village. There were items like the 'Umma's Sap' but the number was quite restricted. But this was a gathering of peddlers. The opportunity

to take advantage of such a department store couldn't be missed. Ark replied with a serious expression.

"Lariette-nim, although he looks like an insect Reid is still a resident of the Netherworld. The heart which regards their family is not that different from ours. But if we ignore a patient just because of their looks then isn't it discrimination?"

Lariette gasped at Ark's speech.

"Thank you, I never expected that you would regard the Galgin clan like that!"

'This bastard insect, why is he holding my hands? I'll have to use some hand disinfectant.'

It was impossible for Ark to like being touched by an insect. Anyway, he just had to pretend for the moment.

"B-but....."

"I believe that Lariette-nim is not one of those people."

Ark looked at Lariette with a trusting expression. After looking at Reid's eyes, she couldn't bear to refuse even if she felt disgusted.

"Phew, I understand."

'Huhuhuhu, another free quest!'

Ark inwardly grinned wickedly. An Innocence Knight had various kinds of recovery magic so it should be settled without any difficulty. When they accepted, a message window appeared in front of Ark and Lariette.

Galgin Clan's Disaster

After a month, Reid and the other peddlers in his clan met in the Forest of Life. But when Reid arrived, his clan was suffering from an unknown disease. Help identify the cause of the disease.

<Difficulty: C>

'They are still cockroaches.'

After a while, Reid guided Ark towards the meeting place. When they arrived there, he noticed that they were plenty of cockroaches gathered. Just like the name

suggested, the Forest of Life was a forest full of vitality. When walking around, there was plenty of lush greenery and warm sun. But the place where the Galgin were gathered had a sombre atmosphere. There were rotting trees everywhere with the Galgin scattered around. Just like Reid said, the situation seemed quite serious.

"Ooooh, c-cold....somebody....."

"Mama, Mama.....stomach hurts.....sob....."

"Huk.....my guts are twisted....."

There was the sound of moaning everywhere. Some of the cockroaches had viscous liquid seeping from their arms and legs while others were vomiting. The terribly sick appearance of the Galgin clan made Lariette pale and she hid behind Ark in terror. When he arrived at the camp, the Galgin was in tears.

"Great-grandfather, great-grandmother, grandfather, aunt, uncle, cousins....!"

All of the cockroaches were Reid's family. Yes, they really couldn't ignore the proliferative capacity of the cockroaches.

"Darling, my sons!"

Reid went crazy and ran towards his family.

"D-Daddy.....It hurts."

"Ooh, really? Don't worry though. Believe in your father. I found someone to help you. Those people will surely make you feel better."

Ark looked at Reid with a stupid expression.

.....He had a wife and children? Anyway, Reid's wife.....the cockroach struggled to raise her body.

"P-please.....no matter what happens to me, my children....."

"What are you saying? You should never give up!"

Reid ran to her and embraced her.

"You have to live no matter what. So you should never give up!"

"Darling....."

Uhh, it was truly a moving scene. If only they weren't cockroaches.

'In reality, I've killed plenty of cockroaches every day and they keep on multiplying.... Well, that would solve the problem but.....'

Ark could even be kind to cockroaches for a quest.

"Don't worry, you will soon regain your health."

"Ohh, Ark, Ark! Please."

Reid clung to Ark and begged.

"Yes, it is my mission."

Ark looked at Lariette quickly while talking. In fact, there was nothing that Ark could do. Ark's only healing skill was Nursing. But Nursing was only an auxiliary skill. It was possible to extend the life but it couldn't treat illness. On the other hand, the Innocence Knight's 'Cure Disease' was magic to treat illnesses. Lariette hesitated before walking towards the cockroaches. She seemed a little bit afraid but spread her hands and chanted.

"Holy God, please get rid of the illnesses that dwell in this body. Cure disease!"

The body of the cockroach was engulfed in a white light.

'Huhuhu, it's over. Now what reward will I get?'

Ark was celebrating. Then Reid unexpectedly shook his antenna and said.

".....What is this? There's no change."

"Yes, the disease is....huh? What is this?"

"Look at the eyes. I don't know what you did but there was no effect."

The symptoms of the female cockroach didn't improve at all. The body remained the same and there was no sign that the health recovered at all. Lariette had a puzzled expression.

"I-it should have worked.....have you perhaps been cursed? Remove Curse!"

But the result was the same. She tried all sorts of cure diseases, release curse and even buffs but the state did not change. Meanwhile, the symptoms seemed to be worsening as they started gasping for breaths. Ark was distressed and used Nursing.

“Find your energy. Will the Galgin clan of the Netherworld be taken out this easily? You shouldn’t collapse in a place like this because of some disease.”

The ‘Nursing’ had an effect. The complexion of the cockroach eased slightly. When Lariette used recovery magic in this state, the health that had dropped to the bottom was restored. But that was the only thing that happened. The combination of ‘Nursing’ and recovery magic could only slow down the disease but nothing more.

‘What the hell? They’re ill but why does the treatment to cure diseases not work?’

For the moment, Ark and Lariette went around the campsite and recovered their health using Nursing and recovery magic. However, the fact that the cockroaches were still hurting was troubling. There were too many and it took one hour to recover to help all the cockroaches. The crisis had been averted for the moment. If Ark used Nursing appropriately then they shouldn’t die. But it was just a temporary solution.

“What now?”

Lariette looked around restlessly. She shook her head and sighed.

“Maybe it’s because my skills are only at the beginner level. I don’t use ‘Cure Disease’ or ‘Remove curse’ that often. But I have no more skill points.....”

She transferred her gaze to Ark. Ark couldn’t think of a good idea. If he used Nursing then he could prevent the illness from proceeding. But he couldn’t just stay here to extend the lives of the cockroaches forever. Even if he stayed until Lariette’s ‘Cure Disease’ skill reached intermediate, he would’ve invested too much time into this quest.

‘I have to give up this quest.’

Ark sighed and shook his head.

“I’m really sorry. We can’t do any more.”

“Ah, ah, Ark! Ah, don’t. It’s a request. A bit more, a bit more! There must be some way. Do you understand? I don’t have the time to find somebody else. If you give up then my family will die. Anything is good. I’ll do whatever you want but please don’t give up!”

Reid cried and hung onto him. He really had tried everything. He also wanted to complete the quest for the reward. Wasn’t that why he had spent an hour using

Nursing? But what was he supposed to do now? Ark started to become annoyed at the insistent cries.

“Stop it. Can’t you see that there is no way to solve this?”

.....It was at that time.

He suddenly felt goose-bumps all over his body and sat down.

‘What the? This feeling is.....?’

Ark felt perplexed at these incomprehensible feelings. Why had he suddenly felt so uneasy? While Ark was looking at Reid, he suddenly recalled a surprisingly memory. He suddenly realised why he felt so unpleasant as he thought back to the past!

-We did our best.

-There is nothing more we can do.

-You should prepare your heart for the worst.

The voices rang inside his head like thunder. Yes, those were all words that Ark had heard from other peoples’ mouths. The doctors had said those words when his mother was in the ICU. It was like that. They said so. Their faces had no sign of apology or pity as they straight up told Ark. As long as they received money, it was not their responsibility.....they seemed like they had no interest in the subject as they spoke about death so easily.

Did the doctors have any idea of the despair they made Ark feel then? The despair of that still was still like a cold knives stuck in his heart. He would sometimes wake up from nightmares of that event. When his mother recovered, he had somewhat forgotten about that incident but now it was ignited again in his heart.

‘But now.....’

Now he was talking with the same voice and expression as those doctors. His eyes showed no concern about the Galgin’s lives. The only emotion he felt was regret that the quest couldn’t be completed. He had talked so easily about his family’s death in front of Reid.

Ark became disillusioned with himself. Whether it was a game or reality wasn’t important.

'The important thing.....I know the pain too well.....yet I dared to say such words so casually. It was me, not other people.....'

Then Lariette spoke to Reid in a tearful voice.

"You know, Ark-nim tried his best. But there is nothing we can do."

Ark interrupted in a low voice.

".....I haven't finished."

"Huh? Ark-nim?"

"I.....still haven't tried my best."

"What are you saying.....?"

Ark knelt beside Reid and took his hand.

"That's right. You are correct. Reid. I haven't tried my best yet. Honestly, I can't give you a definite answer on whether I can cure the disease. I don't know if I can cure it. But I promise. I will never give up. Let's work together."

Yes, these words! They were the words Ark wanted to hear when he was in the ICU. Dangerous. He might have to prepare his heart..... Ark didn't want to hear those words.

He stood in front of the ICU doors all night waiting to hear the right ones.....he just wanted to hear a sincere word. Anyone was fine. Even if it wasn't the surgeon, a resident who was there for training would've been fine. He just wanted someone to have more interest in his mother. If that happen....Ark wouldn't think that the hospital was a place that devoured money.

"Ah, but Ark-nim....."

Ark replied in a decisive voice.

"I'm really sorry. I know that Lariette-nim is uncomfortable. But I'm not going to abandon them. I will hold their hands even if they become corpses."

Lariette was puzzled by Ark's firm attitude. But she smiled strangely after a brief moment and nodded.

"I.....what should be done?"

"It is ineffective but please continue to use Cure Disease. If it really is because Cure Disease is too low then you have no choice but to raise the proficiency. I will continue to use Nursing while investigating a different direction."

"Yes, I understand."

So began a fierce fight against a disease.

Act 8: Ark's Responsibility

One idea could change the world. It was a commonplace phrase in CFs but it was certainly true. When his heart changed, Ark was immediately determined to help the cockroaches. Their appearance didn't matter once he changed his mind. That's right. Racism, religious wars, and even bullying were all social issues that occurred differently. But that all occurred from arrogance and different thoughts..... Anyway, Ark wasn't disgusted by touching the Galgin's hands and feet anymore. He forgot all thoughts of a quest reward. Ark examined the patients like hoped a doctor would. Then he wondered about new questions that he never considered before.

'There's something strange.'

There were approximately 50 Galgin gathered in the camp. But they all had different symptoms.

'They should have the same symptoms if they caught the disease from here. The Galgin are showing over 10 different types of symptoms. It isn't just some simple symptoms but a mixture of them. So it must not be a simple disease. There must be some other reason.'

Ark decided to interpret the events in a different direction. In the world, there was no effect without a cause. The Galgin became sick after entering the forest so they must've done something different. And that act might've evoked the disease. Ark asked the patients what they did after entering the forest.

"Forest....after coming....nothing unusual....huk huk huk."

"Anything is good. It is important so please describe in detail."

"Just.....as always.....gathered to celebrate....ate some food....danced and played.....and not long after.....one by one we started feeling sick....."

'Ate some food?'

Ark eagerly asked again.

“Did you use any different ingredients?”

No..... The ingredients here are scarce....we used a few obtained here....but we mainly ate what we normally do.....”

‘I got it wrong?’

Ark thought they might’ve eaten toxic ingredients. But if he thought again, they were professional travellers so the Galgin should be quite experienced with ingredients. They wouldn’t blindly eat mysterious ingredients found in a forest.

‘But there might be something that tricked them so I should check it out.’

“Where is the place you obtained the ingredients?”

“We couldn’t get any proper ingredients near this area.....so we went far away.....fortunately.....we found a few near the river.....we mixed it with our ingredients..... Just head in the direction of that large tree.....”

“Lariette-nim, wait here for a while.”

Ark left the patients with Lariette and Buksil and went to find the river.

“Dedric, head towards that large tree and look for the river.”

“I’ve found it.”

After a while, Dedric came back from scouting and directed him towards the river. It was a rainbow river commonly found in the Netherworld. But it wasn’t easy to find ingredients near the river. The foxes had a keen sense of smell and they would swallow the plants whenever it grew. Ark was patient and finally found one.

“Let’s have a look shall we? Ingredient Identification!”

Asatarod

An edible grass which grows naturally on the riverbank. The roots and leaves can be eaten and it can be used as a spice.

“Was it a useless thought?”

Ark sighed and shook his head. Then there was a lively sound as an information window appeared again.

The advanced effects of 'Ingredient Identification' had obtained further information.

The Asatarod you are currently holding has been deformed because it grew beside a polluted river. If a person with no resistance consumes it, the fatal symptoms of headache and fever will be displayed. However, the Asatarod can also be used as a medicine to treat the toxicity. Thus, depending on the processing method you can extract a medicine to treat the symptoms caused.

When Ingredient Identification became an advanced skill, there were no additional effects. He never paid it that much attention, but he never thought that it would help in this manner.

"What the, polluted river?"

Ark obtained some water from the river and used Ingredient Identification again.

Polluted River Water

Water from a river running through the Forest of Life, which can be used to make food.*Advanced Additional Information: It looks like ordinary water but a closer look shows that it has been polluted with an unknown mixture of chemicals. The effects of consuming too many kinds of chemicals are unimaginable, and the level of contamination even affects the surrounding flora and fauna.

"As expected, there was a problem with the food the Galgin ate."

Ark was convinced of his reasoning after investigating. And he was able to guess the reason for the Galgins' multiple symptoms. The river had numerous chemicals mixed into it. Those chemicals could either be good or bad for the body. And the plants growing around the river would be deformed by those chemicals. If the Galgins had learned advanced Ingredient Identification then they probably wouldn't have eaten such dangerous ingredients. But the ingredients looked like normal ones so they just used it casually in their food. Therefore, the Galgin had a mixture of food poisoning and chemical poisoning. Therefore Lariette's Cure Disease and Ark's Nursing didn't have an effect.

'Even so, the Galgin have food poisoning.....'

The environment pollution was a more serious problem for them.

'Well, there's a solution now that I've found the cause.'

Ark recalled the information discovered using Ingredient Identification. The river didn't just have toxic chemicals mixed in. There were also some good medications. So he had to treat the food poisoning and toxic materials with the good medication. Medicine could also become a poison. So he had to extract the good parts while neutralizing the toxins using the same processing method. Ark looked at the river with a serious expression. He had figured out a method. But there were several problems implementing it. First, he had to investigate what ingredients the Galgin ate. It was in order to determine the cause of the symptoms and how to treat it.

'Hopefully the Galgin will be conscious so I can question them and figure out how to make the medicine.....'

The information window showed the method of processing the food ingredient to obtain the medicine. Soaked in water, dried, fried, steamed etc.....there were numerous methods to extract the medicine. He needed a large amount of time and effort to investigate the right methods one by one. But that was a problem for the future.

'The urgent problem is that I have to collect at least 20~30 samples of each ingredient in order to research it.'

Ark looked gloomily around the river. The river in the forest was quite large. But he couldn't find any ingredients no matter how he looked. The Bandit Foxes ate everything. He barely gather one after 10 minutes so he couldn't imagine how long collecting 20~30 would take.

'I also have to keep using Nursing on the Galgin so I can't spend the whole time collecting ingredients. Lariette and Buksil's Ingredient Foraging skill is only at the beginner level so it would likely fail even if they find an ingredient.'

Ark was worried for a while before he thought of a method.

'That's right. It's a little expensive, but it is possible with that skill.'

--

"Dedric, Razak. Drive them out!"

"Understood, wooooo!"

Clack clack clack clack!

Dedric and Razak yelled wildly through the forest.

“Lariette-nim, drive them out with Buksil!”

Lariette and Buksil were swinging sticks at the bushes on the other side. Ark closed his eyes and concentrated everything on his hearing. After a while, he heard the sound of something stepping on leaves nearby. Ark opened his eyes and raised his hand.

“It’s near, Mind’s Eye!”

Then the eyeball ring on his finger rolled around and shot out sonic waves. At the same time, there was a blurry picture where previously he couldn’t see anything. There were Bandit Foxes disguised with Protective Colouration. Even though it changed colour to camouflage with the surroundings, the foxes became surprised and ran away as soon as Ark headed towards it. If someone approached it, the Bandit Fox would use its enormous speed to run away.

That was why Ark was so worried about the Bandit Foxes.

‘Huhuhu, it is still an animal despite its speed.’

Ark grinned and laughed.

Kaheong!

He heard the screams of the foxes after a few seconds. When he turned his head, Ark saw that the Bandit Foxes was struggling with the vine wrapped around its body. That’s right. It was Nadingka’s fruit! Ark had spread Nadingka’s fruit around in advance in a similar method to land mines. Then Dedric, Razak, Lariette and Buksil pushed the fox towards the minefield. Thanks to that, Ark managed to reduce its movement speed by 50%. Although it was still fast, he could now catch it.

“That’s it, Sprint!”

Ark narrowed the distance.

“Demonic Opening, Elemental Sword fire property, Flash!”

He swung the sword covered with ghosts and fire at the foxes. They were only level 100. And he increased his attack power using the skills. But Nadingka’s fruit only lasted 1 minute so it was highly likely that the foxes would escape. This time Ark used Flash to increase the damage as much as possible.

“Whew, it isn’t that difficult to catch them once I’ve made up my mind.”

Fortunately, the foxes had low defense so he killed it with two shots.

Ssak ssak, ssak ssak ssak ssak!

Radun jumped down and instantly ran to the fox's corpse. Just like Ark, Radun had also been stressed because of the foxes.

"Radun, stop. Move your body. Now we have a few of them."

Ark returned to the camp carrying the Bandit Fox's bodies. The camp already had the body of three foxes.

"Altogether we have 6. This should be enough. If there is too much then I'd be in trouble."

Ark gathered the bodies of the foxes together and looked at Razak. Yes, that was the reason why Ark suddenly started catching them.

"Razak, now it's time to show the effect of your evolution. Death's Equations!"

Yes, it was the skill that Deimos learned after he evolved into Razak. Ark had never used this skill so far. There was no reason to use it when it consumed some of Razak's bones. However, this time Ark would accept the damage. Razak sighed and demolished 6 ribs. The ribs powder was then sprinkled over the corpses of the foxes.

Razak had offered his ribs to use Death's Equations.

<Stamina -2, Defense -1>

Due to 'Death's Equations' the Chimera=Bandit Fox A, B, C, D, E, F has been resurrected. The 'Chimera=Bandit Fox' will absolute obey every command while the spell is maintained. But if Razak moves from his current location or loses concentration then the spell will be disabled.

The bodies of the foxes trembled after the skill was activated. It looked like some kind of zombie was being created. But it didn't matter as 50% of the health and stats were restored.

"Okay, you will be named the processing unit. You will go around the riverside and search for ingredients. But you can't eat them. Bring all the gathered food to me!"

Kung kung kung kung!

The zombie fox unit saluted and ran to the riverside. It was why Ark hunted the Bandit Foxes. Even with 50% of their stats, it was equivalent to Ark's speed when he used Sprint. They also had a keen sense of smell and the ability to forage ingredients. In other words, the foxes could run around constantly at Ark's fastest speed to gather ingredients. That was the key point. Well, he had to sacrifice 6 of Razak's ribs but.....It would only take a couple of days to restore again.

Anyway, the six foxes ran around gathering ingredients. They scoured the river for ingredients.

"That's it, now I just have to wait."

Clack clack.....clack clack clack....

Razak had been deprived of his ribs and sat miserably in a corner of the camp.

Kung kung kung kung!

A fox came back with one ingredient. It couldn't grasp it so the fox had to bring them back one by one. Sometimes they would come back wounded. They were branded as traitors by other foxes and occasionally attacked. But the foxes had absolute loyalty to Razak and diligently carried the food away.

'Hmm, if they bite only one then bringing the ingredients isn't that efficient. By the way, I'm actually a little bit sorry after seeing them wounded.'

Ssak ssak? Ssak ssak ssak ssak!

When Radun saw the foxes, it stared at them coldly before running up and squeezing them. It was punishment for stealing from Ark. On the other hand, Buksil was terrified when he saw the scene.

'Scary, he really is the god of exploitation. It isn't enough to use our bodies to scrape ingredients..... Now he's using the Bandit Foxes as well. If they don't listen to him and collect the ingredients then he'll probably just kill them. They can't get away from that person even when dead.'

Thus, Ark planted a new form of horror inside the poor pig merchant. After 3~4 hours had passed, there were many ingredients gathered.

"Larriette-nim, write down every patient's symptoms without leaving anything out. Buksil, write down everything I tell you on a notepad."

"Huh? Yes!"

Faced with the thought of discipline, Buksil approached holding a notepad.

“Now let’s begin.”

Ark had been resting while the foxes gathered the ingredients and now he burst into action. He started with identifying the ingredients.

“Ingredient Identification!”

Karantatura

A moss which grows in the river. It can revive the body when added to soup.

* Advanced Additional Information: It has grown in the polluted water and has been contaminated with a lethal toxin. If a person with no resistance eats it, strong sores will attack the body. If purified in a special way, you can extract a soothing anti-inflammatory medicine.

As he guessed, all the ingredients in the river had been contaminated. The cockroaches who ate it with their food had no choice but to receive food poisoning. Now Ark needed to figure out what food they mixed it with.

‘If I compare the symptoms discovered by Lariette with the ingredients then I will figure out the answer. The problem is how to extract the medicine.’

Ark took several equipment out of the Galgin’s bags. He took several ingredients and tried a variety of methods such as burning, soaking it in water etc. and then checked with Ingredient Identification while Buksil wrote the results down. There were hundreds of ingredients but he stayed patient while testing out every method and recording it.

‘If I give up then the 50 Galgin will die!’

He felt a commitment to studying, just like someone learning medicine would feel. After 8 hours, Ark started to realise the best method of extracting the medicine from the ingredients. It wasn’t completely clear but he noticed a pattern.

‘Well....if I put most of the toxic ingredients in pure water and soak for 30 minutes before boiling then the poison would be neutralized. If steamed or baked, the toxin became stronger while boiling would weaken the toxin. If I baked it after boiling then wouldn’t the medicine be extracted?’

It was the first time Ark had tried these cooking methods. Normally he just put them in the pot and his cooking skill would automatically make the food. But he couldn’t

use that cooking method this time. He had to check the ingredients manually one by one during the process. It would be lucky if the processing of ingredients created a good dish. With survival cooking, he would only know the results of the dish after eating it. It meant that Ark might also be stricken by poison. Anyway, Ark just concentrated on researching the ingredients instead of eating it. But he couldn't lose himself in the work completely.

"Ark-nim, it is time for your rounds."

Lariette said after checking the status of the patients. While he was researching, the Galgins' health was still falling thanks to their illness. So Ark had to occasionally stop his research to go around and use Nursing.

"My studies have progressed so please have courage. Once I've treated you then you'll become healthier and will be able to carry around a backpack again."

Fortunately they held up but the Galgin were getting thinner every hour. But the Galgin noticed Ark's sincerity and thanked him every time.

"Yes, thank you."

"We will believe in Ark-nim."

"I'll have no regrets even if I die."

Ark felt pained every time he heard such words. No matter how different they looked, their images would overlap with his mothers who would bow her head in gratitude every time a doctor showed her kindness.

'Yes, I can't afford to be resting. The patients will suffer while I'm resting. I need to figure out the extraction methods faster.'

Ark didn't take a break and just headed straight back into work. And he once again focused on researching the ingredients. How much time had passed? In the meantime, Lariette had disconnected and then returned.

A full day had passed. Ark however stayed in the game and only clung to studying, refusing to even eat or drink something in reality. Ark persisted even when he became dizzy. Then Lariette spoke in a worried voice.

"You'll be in trouble at this rate. Please take a break."

"No, I'm fine. The work is almost over. Please be patient...."

Ark didn't even look around and just stared at his work. Lariette looked at Ark with a complicated expression.

'I don't understand. That guy.....what type of person is he?'

She couldn't understand Ark even after travelling with him for one week. She had been happy after meeting him in the Netherworld. Lariette was even more impressed after Ark ran to her rescue. If a man's dream was a beautiful woman, a woman's fantasy was a man who would risk their life for her. It didn't matter if it was in a game. But now she was seeing a strange side to Ark. At first, he treated her like every other man. Then his attitude underwent a 180 degree change after entering a mentor and disciple relationship. In addition, he exploited Lariette and Buksil under the guise of teaching. Of course, such an image wasn't bad. She had only been the receiver of over-eager attention in her life. However, she knew that their intentions weren't 'pure.' She was a woman, but she only received attention because of her looks. Even after comparing his actions, she never saw those intentions in Ark. Therefore Lariette felt that it was convenient to be with Ark. No, she felt impressed after he taught her combat skills. But she just had a vague good impression of him. Those feelings once again changed today.

'How can someone do all this for an NPC? I didn't want to help because I was disgusted by their appearance.....Ark-nim is different. At first I thought it was due to a quest reward, but.....it's not.'

After working for a long time at the reception desk, it was possible for her to grasp people's sincerity. Despite what people told her, she could tell through their eyes and voices. And it was obvious that Ark really wanted to help the Galgin. Otherwise, he would not invest Razak's stats for a quest reward. He was different from the person who exploited her and Buksil.

'I don't understand. What is Ark-nim's true self? When did he show it to me? Was it when he taught me combat skills? When he exploited us? Or maybe.....when he stayed up all night helping the Galgin?'

In Lariette's head, Ark was increasingly becoming a person who she couldn't understand.

'Anyway, Ark is a much more affectionate person than he seems.'

The answer she came up with after a long time worrying.....was no answer. But she just looked at Ark and laughed.

‘Yes, I honestly like this more than someone pretending to be good in front of a woman. Furthermore, discovering the method after a small clue.....he is also very smart. Did he graduate from a medical college? He treats the patients skillfully.’

It was really different.....once again she had misunderstood.

Anyway, she couldn’t endure like Ark so she disconnected and went to sleep. The next morning she got up early and accessed the game. It had been 32 hours since he started. Buksil was dozing while holding the magic projector. And Ark was still engaged in research. She deliberately got up early but Lariette had nothing to do so she just sat on the side and watched. It was a somewhat comical scene as she could see Dark Wolf’s tail wagging around.

“Well, it would be better with his original face.....”

Lariette murmured and laughed. It was at that time.

“Hahaha! That’s it, that’s it! I’ve finally found the information for all the ingredients.

Ark suddenly jumped up and yelled excitedly. Buksil was shocked and picked up the magic projector.

“Huk, what, what the?” “Ark-nim, it’s over?”

“Yes, I’m done! Now I understand the extraction method for all the ingredients! All I have to do is adjust it for the patient and feed them. I’ll start treatment immediately so please follow me with the ingredients.”

“...Ark-nim, you have huge bags under your eyes.”

Ark had stayed up 32 hours and his complexion was like the zombie foxes. But Ark just shook his head.

“I won’t be able to sleep if the Galgin is suffering after I’ve finished my research. I’ll be able to sleep much better if I treat them first.”

Ah, wasn’t it a wonderful sight? Ark had always wanted to act like a doctor.

“Okay, that was terrific!”

Buksil filmed it with the magic projector and gave him a secret thumbs up without Lariette noticing. And soon the human medical drama began. Ark approached a patient with a calm expression and said.

“Now, please tell me all your symptoms and don’t leave anything out.”

"I have a splitting headache.....and my whole body is itchy because of boils..... I can't swallow food and water without vomiting....."

"That's right. The 'dried powder made of Rarona seed' will treat the headache while the 'steamed toxic Urana roots' will treat the boils. Your stomach is injured from eating the food so you should eat the 'Kalpana leaves' which has been soaked in pure water for 24 hours."

Ark murmured and put the ingredients into his pot. He used the pure water Buksil obtained from a faraway place and made the necessary dishes using Survival Cooking. The smell of herbal medicine drifted from the pot. The one unfortunate thing was that even though it 100% treated the Galgin's injuries, it did not improve his pets' stats as well. Then Ark filtered the dregs from the soup and fed it to his patient.

"Oh, my body.....my body is starting to feel better."

"Some of your symptoms will disappear instantly. If you take the medication properly then the remaining symptoms will clear up and you will recover immediately. Now, what are your symptoms?"

Ark listened to every patient's symptoms and administered the medicine. The cockroaches' faces started clearing up. When Ark heard the symptoms and made the medicine, the Galgin's illness disappeared.

"Wow, this, unbelievable.....!"

"So many symptoms are gone in a flash!"

"Daddy!"

Reid's wife and children became better and got up. After suffering from the illness for so many days, all of the Galgins' eyes were focused on Ark.

"It's all thanks to Ark-nim!"

"Ark-nim is the most skilled doctor in the entire world!"

"I just combined the right food ingredients."

Ark modestly exclaimed while the Galgin instantly shook their heads.

"Don't say that. We are not blind. Everyone saw how hard Ark-nim worked. You've stayed up all night and constantly studied the ingredients."

"We were able to endure because we could see Ark-nim. If it wasn't for Ark-nim.....we would all.....huk.....thank you very much.

The 50 Galgin bowed and expressed their gratitude. The campsite suddenly became a place with a lot of activity.

"Wow, it's a very human documentary!"

Buksil was also shedding tears while filming with the magic projector.

"Master is so dumb, going to all that effort to save some cockroaches....sniff."

Dedric muttered while sneakily rubbing at his eyes. Then, a message flashed in front of Ark with a cheerful sound.

After studying the ingredients deeply, the rating of 'Survival Cooking' has risen.

Survival Cooking (Master, Passive): After deeply studying the ingredients, you have reached a new level of cooking. Now you can draw out the effects of ingredients by 100% and change the effect through various secret ingredients. In addition, the more skilful handling of ingredients means that the expiration date will lengthen while the associated penalties will also increase.

In fact, his survival cooking skill had reached 499 a long time ago. But no matter how much he created, it would not reach 500. In order to reach the mastered stage, he needed a new type of enlightenment. However, that was not the end of the bonuses. A new information window appeared before the other one even disappeared.

Since 'Survival Cooking' has reached the 'Master' stage, you are able to choose it as a sub-profession.

<Food Worshipper>

Master Chef.

In the past, a medicine derived from nature was created by a foreigner. The secret to it was 'Conscious Mobilization.' Food and medicine to treat illness has the same foundation. In some cases, medicine can be created using weeds on the side of the road. Survival cooking is a skill that has been developed using this knowledge. Now that you have become a master in Survival Cooking, you can actively practice that 'Conscious Mobilization.'

When you become a 'Food Worshipper', a bonus will be applied to a successful

Survival Cooking dish.

Would you like to accept the 'Food Worshipper sub-profession?

Ark read the information window carefully. The sub-profession could be changed at any time. Prior to this, he received an offer to become a gladiator at the Evil Silrion but refused because it required him to participate in the tournament once a month. Furthermore, there was a bonus applied to survival cooking dishes?

"I select the Food Worshipper sub-profession."

You have chosen the sub-profession Food Worshipper.

* The requirement to become a culinary master in Survival Cooking is complete.* A bonus of 50 is applied to the proficiency of Survival Cooking and Ingredient Identification.

* 20% increase in the probability of making the best dishes.

* The profession-specific skill 'Herbal Decoction' has been learned.

(Herbal Decoction (Beginner, Passive): As a 'Food Worshipper,' you will be able to determine the medicinal effects of ingredients when using Ingredient Identification.

While you boil the ingredients using 'Herbal Decoction,' a special effect will be added to the medicine. The herbal medicines can show a variety of therapeutic and nourishing effects, and can be poured into an empty bottle and used like potions. Herbal medicines can be used in battles and there is no expiration date.

'Huk, what is this?'

He could use the ingredients to boil the ingredients and create a herbal medicine? And he could use it like regular potions in battles? In other words, it was a skill to create potions like alchemy. He was also using regular food ingredients instead of the expensive magic items. Of course, his herbal decoction skill was only at a beginner's level so he couldn't make medicines that would rival recovery potions. It might even be better to cook more food. But there was a separate part that attracted Ark's attention.

'Since it doesn't expire, there is no need to discard it once it becomes spoiled!'

It meant he could sell the herbal medicines on the auction site.

"Ha.....ha ha ha! Ha ha ha!"

Ark released an involuntary burst of laughter. It was indeed New World! If he made an effort then the world would reward him! He had spent a few days submerged in this task. He suddenly felt dizzy after all the tension melted away. Lariette who had been watching from the sidelines and the Galgin flocked towards him. Lariette spoke in a concerned voice.

“Okay, it’s finished now. Stop and rest.”

But Ark shook his head with a firm expression.

“Not yet.....there is still something to be done.”

“Huh? The patients are treated now.”

“Isn’t it? So.....”

Ark murmured in a low voice as he approached Reid. Then he extended his hand and said.

“G-give me the compensation.”

At that point everyone froze.

--

‘Oh my God!’

Hyun-woo rushed through the hospital with an embarrassed expression. How could he make such a mistake? He was amazed just thinking about it. He realized the mistake 1 hour before. After staying up a few days to rescue the cockroaches, Hyun-woo succumbed to sleep. Then he connected like usual to New World. Lariette and Buksil connected at the same time and greeted him with a smile.

“Ark-nim, Happy New Year.”

“Happy New Year!”

Hyun-woo was confused for a moment.

“That.....sorry but I don’t think I can play the game today. I need to go somewhere.”

His surprise continued after hearing Lariette’s words. Yes, New Year’s Day had arrived while Ark had been sleeping.

“Hehehe, Ark-nim, I’ve got a lot of time unlike Lariette-nim.”

“Then please continue gathering ingredients!”

Ark yelled before disconnecting. Then he got dressed and ran to the hospital.

‘Where on earth did I sell my spirit?’

Obviously he sold it to New World.....

After the end of year party, he had prepared for New Year. If he was still exercising daily at dawn then he probably wouldn’t have made this mistake. However he stopped exercising for a while and his sense of time had been distorted after staying awake for 32 hours to help the cockroaches.

‘Pathetic.....how could I forget about New Year’s Day?’

In fact, Hyun-woo’s melancholy was usually the greatest on New Year’s. Five years ago, his relatives and friends of his parents would flock and give him a lot of money. But it changed entirely after his father passed away. Were they scared to be associated with Hyun-woo? The acquaintances and his relatives didn’t even send a greeting card on New Year’s. He had become like that. A worthless thing.... At that time, Hyun-woo was a high school student who felt exhausted.

‘I don’t care. It’s just a holiday.....’

But his mother was different. She never had anyone in her hospital room to celebrate New Year’s Day with her. Therefore the sense of loss became even more magnified. And now her one child had gone crazy and logged into a game on New Year’s Day. It was afternoon and he hadn’t even shown his face? Was there anyone else like this in the world?

“Hey, don’t jump in the hallway!”

A nurse exclaimed as he jumped onto the stairs. Their nerves were already sensitive because they had to work on New Year’s. But why would he care about the mood of a nurse? Hyun-woo just sprinted towards the hospital room. Just as he was about to open the door, he flinched and stopped. His hands were empty. After he remembered and ran at full speed, he couldn’t prepare a fruits basket. Although he was late, he rummaged through his wallet but it was empty. He forgot to withdraw money in advance.

‘What should I do? Should I find an ATM to withdraw cash and buy a fruits basket?’

Hyun-woo stood in front of the room contemplating for a moment.

"Hahaha, that's right. He is certainly not that charming. We've talked about it before."

"Oppa, this is a hospital room. Keep your voice down a little bit."

"Well said Hye-sun. Such noisy guys.....do you think this is a market? Anyway, the problem is that they are unable to learn. That's why I told you not to come."

"Ah hyung-nim, you're terrible. Aren't you glad that we're helping?"

"Hehehe, don't be angry. We knew that Hyung-nim must've been excited about spending time with noona. We understand."

"Ohu, so that's what happened earlier."

"What, what are you guys saying....that, it's not like that!"

"Oho, look at you blushing like a child. It's not very convincing."

'Hye-sun?' In addition, these voices are.....?"

Hyun-woo opened the door with a puzzled look. He never imagined the things that were occurring in the room. Gwon Hwa-rang and 10 rehabilitation members.....the big men were gathered in a small hospital room. And there were a variety of holiday food placed on the tables.

"Ah, Hyun-woo."

His mother who was surrounded by rehabilitation members spotted Hyun-woo.

"Mother, this is...."

"They all came to see you."

"Huh?"

Hyun-woo looked at the rehabilitation members with a foolish expression. And he felt very emotional at the sight of his mother laughing happily amongst everybody.

"Hyung-nims.....!"

Ark had only just realized it was a holiday and hurriedly ran to the hospital. Then he found that the rehabilitation members were one step ahead and already at the

hospital. They even prepared hospital food.....It was the first time Hyun-woo had seen such an act of kindness after the accident. Now it felt strange to him since Hyun-woo wasn't used to it. Was he upset at someone taking care of him? No, they didn't give anything to Hyun-woo so he wasn't upset. But it involved his mother so he was unable to express his gratitude.

"Oppa, you're late!"

Jung Hye-sun said while sitting next to his mother. She made it seem like they had arranged to meet.

"Uh....Yes."

Hyun-woo replied in an awkward voice and entered the room. At that moment Hyun-woo felt really strange. Gwon Hwa-rang, Jung Hye-sun and the rehabilitation members being at the hospital was really unexpected. So naturally he felt awkward interrupting. But Hyun-woo joined them in laughing and being noisy. How much time had passed?

Since they all played the game, naturally the topic turned to New World. The first to speak was Hye-sun.

"Hey Oppa.....you're in the place called the Netherworld?"

"Why? Are you bored without me?"

"Bah, what are you saying?"

Hye-sun pouted at Hyun-woo's words. But after a brief moment, she spoke in an anxious voice.

"I've heard rumours around Cairo. There's a bounty on Hyun-woo oppa."

"Bounty? For me?"

Hyun-woo asked bewildered. In New World, users could place bounties on other users. But the target had to be chaotic in order to get a formal reward from the government. It wasn't possible to hang a bounty on someone who wasn't chaotic in New World. Hyun-woo wasn't chaotic so he couldn't understand the bounty.

"It's not a formal bounty through the government."

"What? Then....?"

"The Hermes guild has offered a 'Merchant's Contract' to the chaotic users."

Hye-sun described the contents of the contract that she overheard.

-Merchant's Agreement.

<Contractor: Raiden= Unspecified>

The person with this contract who gets rid of Ark will be paid a reward of 100 gold.

Raiden created a mug shot of Ark and scattered the contract among the chaotic players. Hye-sun often travelled between Lancel Village and Cairo where there were a lot of chaotic users so she heard the rumours.

"I heard they scattered quite a lot of contracts."

"Bah, that Raiden.....he's using cheap tricks like always."

Hye-sun was worried but Ark dismissed it. If he was the same as before then it would definitely seem threatening. But Ark wasn't worried about chaotic users any more. Chaotic players received various penalties so they had a slower growth than general users. Moreover, 100 gold was a large amount but it wasn't to the extent that they would hang themselves. In other words, Ark's high level meant that not many chaotic users would consider 100 gold worth the risk. He was able to handle pioneers like Jewel and Duke so 3~4 chaotic users wouldn't be a threat. It didn't matter if they formed a group and attacked.

'Raiden also probably doesn't expect the chaotic players to catch me. He already has evidence that I'm in the Netherworld but he's not showing that information to the public.'

Hermes Guild.....the pioneers probably contacted each other off line as well. In other words, Raiden probably knew about the Netherworld through Jewel or Duke. He knew that Ark was there. Even so, he never mentioned the Netherworld to the chaotic users at all.

'It is difficult to find someone in New World. The contract is in middle earth.....so my location will probably be identified quickly when I return to middle earth. If a chaotic user with a contract dies because of me then Raiden will be able to determine my location. This means that the chaotic users are hounds that Raiden released to find me in middle earth.'

In this situation, Raiden didn't have to waste 1 copper in order to obtain a large source of information. Indeed Raiden.....his ability to use cheap tricks was superior to everyone else.

‘If the chaotic players stick to me than it can become a little annoying.....’

But if he killed someone with a chaotic alignment then there was a 100% chance that one equipped item would drop. If people wearing bank notes approached him then of course Hyun-woo would be glad.

‘But the Hermes guild is occupying Silvana. They must have recovered if they’re doing something like this. Huhuhu, well okay. If Silvana stabilizes and develops then it will be more rewarding later on. Until then they can run freely.’

Hyun-woo laughed and shook his head.

“You don’t have to worry about those contracts. If the prize money is not officially offered by the officials then there will be a significant penalty.”

At that time, Jjak-tung who had been studying Ark’s face interrupted.

“Speaking of New World.....there is a slight setback in the Slime’s Immortality Pill production plan.”

Currently Gwon Hwa-rang, Jung Hye-sun and the rehabilitation members were collecting the Slime’s Essence in the underground labyrinth. And the progress of the operation could be described as successful. They’ve collected quite a lot of ‘Slime’s Essence’ and raised their level considerably as well. But an unexpected problem occurred when they tried making the Slime’s Immortality Pill. First of all the ‘Corrupted Fairy Wings’.....Ark was going to collect more while hunting. However, there was a sudden disruption to the supply since he went to the Netherworld. And the second more serious problem was the ‘Unicorn Horn.’

“The ‘Unicorn Horn’ is more difficult to obtain than we thought. In the past it cost 700 gold but now the price has surged to 1,000 gold.”

“Yes, I have heard.”

Hyun-woo sighed and nodded. In fact, Hyun-woo had confirmed the information on the auction site. Surprisingly there were a lot of people trying to obtain unicorn horns on the auction site. That was because users had found a new purpose for the unicorn horns. In the past it was only used as an ingredient in the highest level potions, but now they found that it could add significant options to a warrior’s sword or a magician’s wand. But thanks to the indiscriminate catching, it was extremely difficult to find a unicorn these days. Due to the shortage it was natural that the price would soar.....but that meant his production line was interrupted.

'If I want to make a profit with Slime's Immortality Pill then I have to find unicorn horns for less than 700 gold. It would be difficult to make profit if it costs 1,000 gold. And I don't have the time to go around looking for the corrupted fairy wings. They might need to buy it from a store which will make the total earnings a deficit.'

If he couldn't make a profit then it was just a waste of time.

"Sheesh, I thought of such a good plan.....'

Ark sighed and replied.

"It isn't possible. The production of Slime's Immortality Pill will stop for the moment."

"Then we can leave the underground labyrinth?"

The rehabilitation members asked with great joy. In fact, the rehabilitation members' main problem was not the cost of materials. Ark had gone to the Netherworld approximately one month ago.....thus the rehabilitation group had been stuck hunting in the labyrinth for a month. At first their levels rose fast and it was interesting to obtain the 'Slime's Essence,' but that changed after a month.

"I don't want to look at slimes and skeletons anymore."

"Sunlight.....I want to see the sun....."

"I feel like I've been stuck in a cell."

Since Roco could ride the unicorn to obtain food, they couldn't even use that excuse to go outside. Thanks to Roco's consideration, they spent one month smelling like a sewerage plant. Now they felt sick if they even heard any mention of Cairo's underground labyrinth.

"Yes, but how many 'Slime's Essences' have you found?"

"....10."

"So if you find 2 more essences to make 12 then it will be enough for Hwa-rang ajusshi, Hye-sun and hyung-nims. Talk to Sid and ask him to obtain the unicorn horns and corrupted fairy wings when it is available for a cheap price."

"Yes, we'll check it when we have time as well."

"And we'll promise to pay you back the royalties once we figure it out."

"No, you already went to all that effort so some of it will belong to you."

Hyun-woo was very thankful to the rehabilitation members and promised them some of the royalties. Since he met up with the rehabilitation members, he asked them about Shambala. They had a unicorn horn that had been sent by Shambala. When Ark gave him the first scroll, Shambala had promised to exchange it for the unicorn horns and corrupted fairy wings.

As expected from Shambala. Shambala had already obtain the corrupted fairy wings and made the immortality pill. After seeing the effects, he sent the extra unicorn horn to the rehabilitation members. Of course....

It was placed on a credit note. Along with a similar message. Thanks to the relationship between Ark and Shambala, he was willing to give them the items.

'Anyway, we've obtained 2 unicorn horns from Shambala and now he is going to begin cleaning up the Dark Brothers organization. Then isn't he going to advance to the 2nd stage profession before me?'

Hyun-woo was aware of threat. While Hyun-woo was thinking, Jjak-tung suddenly scratched his head and said with an embarrassed look.

"I'm really sorry. We've just been talking among ourselves....are you bored?"

"It's okay. It's pleasant watching people have fun."

His mother smiled at Jjak-tung while Gwon Hwa-rang glared.

"Ah.....we're stealing precious minutes from Hyung-nim."

"W-What the!"

"Don't become so angry. We're supporting Hyung-nim."

Jjak-tung laughed and got up from his seat.

"Now, we have to say goodbye to the raccoons in the underground labyrinth so should we return to New World? Hyung-nim should stay a little and clean up. Hey, let's go. You guys too."

Jjak-tung dragged the rehabilitation members away from the hospital.

"Mother, I'll come back in a few days."

"I'll go with Hyun-woo oppa."

Hyun-woo and Jung Hye-sun followed the rehabilitation members' example. Hyun-woo and Jung Hye-sun entered the hallway where the rehabilitation members were waiting.

"What, these people?"

"Are they here to get back some loans?"

"That ward is where the patients with large operations are....."

"But to even visit the hospital on a holiday."

People were gossiping at a distance. Since the 10 of them looked like gangsters, it was natural for there to be a misunderstanding. That was the reason Gwon Hwarang never brought them to the hospital. Bul-kkun heard what the gossips were saying and sighed.

"Hye-sun, Hyun-woo, you should fall back a little bit."

"Why?"

Of course, Hyun-woo also heard the voices. Perhaps if Hyun-woo didn't know the rehabilitation members then he would also gossip. But Hyun-woo proudly held his head high and walked side by side with them. Then he spoke in a loud voice.

"Hyung-nims, I'll pay for lunch today. There's a great restaurant nearby."

The rehabilitation members jumped and turned to Hyun-woo. Hyun-woo nodded and smiled at them.

".....Thank you."

"We really, really appreciate it."

The rehabilitation members laughed and put their arms around Hyun-woo's shoulder.

"This child, thank you."

"Let's go!" Hyun-woo is paying for our meals for once."

"I'm only going to eat rice. Then let's watch a movie."

Jung Hye-sun grabbed his shirt and murmured. Hyun-woo left the hospital with a large grin.

.....On the other hand, Gwon Hwa-rang was left alone with Park So-mi. There was an awkward silence before Gwon Hwa-rang got up and started cleaning the mess.

“Those stupid guys.....I’m sorry. Normally they’re not that troublesome.....”

“.....Why don’t you sit down a little bit more?”

Park So-mi spoke in a low voice and grasped his hand.

“Thank you.”

“Huh? Yes? What is it?”

“Hyun-woo laughing like that.....I’ve finally seeing it after a long time.”

Park So-mi looked at the door where Hyun-woo and the rehabilitation members had exited through.

“It’s all thanks to Detective Gwon.”

“M-me.....no. You’re exaggerating....I mean.....”

Gwon Hwa-rang stuttered with an embarrassed face. Gwon Hwa-rang really felt that way. But Park So-mi just leaned her head on his shoulder. She had no immunity against the sight of Hyun-woo laughing with Gwon Hwa-rang. Even though he could clearly smell the alcohol, it seemed like Gwon Hwa-rang was surrounded by a garden of flowers.

The new year was bright. Gwon Hwa-rang was having a truly happy New Year’s.

Act 9: Magaro’s Laboratory

‘Huhuhu, it is a jackpot.’

Ark had connected after resting comfortably and started blowing and polishing the lamp again.

“Aigoo, you’ve become so beautiful.”

Ark rubbed his cheek against the lamp and happily smiled. Except for the skull carved on the handle, it looked like an ordinary old lamp but it was the reward for completing the <Galgin Clan’s Disaster> quest. Of course, the reward item wasn’t just an antique. It was a magic item with options! The problem was the special effect of the lamp was truly vague. But the smart Ark could tell with one glance. The rare lamp was more valuable than some rare items.

Or it was for Ark who was a Dark Walker. He had finished the quest right before going to sleep.....but he asked for the compensation from Reid first.

“T-the reward.....”

Reid scratched his head with an embarrassed look. Although he had made the request with an urgent heart, he couldn't think of a suitable reward. He trembled as Ark's face slowly hardened.

“Of course. Reward! Of course I've prepared it. You've saved our lives so we have to give you the best thing we have. Please wait.”

Reid gathered the other Galgin together. And they huddled in a corner and conferred for a while.

“Aye, what do we have to give?”

“Let's see? Do you know what the human's middle earth is like?”

“How about this? I obtained it in the south.....”

“This is also acceptable. It is 300 of the Ranke fruit.”

Their opinions were divided as they showed Reid different options. Since 3 people completed the quest, three rewards needed to be given. In fact, Ark had used Discerning Eye on Reid in the past and knew that the Galgin didn't have many good items. So he didn't expect a big reward for this quest. But even so, this was terrible.

Reid confidently showed him the items <The Netherworld's Western Region eating competition victory token (The person who possesses this can eat food for free at any store in the Western Region), <A carved sculpture of the Galgin Clan (If you possess this then your intimacy with the Galgin Clan will increase> and <Reid's proud collection of 10 species (A pile of trash that is no use>

Ark became angry after checking the compensation list.

‘Eating for free? Is this a joke? Who cares about eating for free in the Netherworld? In addition, a statue of a cockroach? My intimacy with the Galgin is already the best thanks to this quest so what is the use of the statue? There aren't any good options. What the hell is this crap?’

When researching the ingredients, Ark had obviously wanted to help the Galgin. He accepted that he would suffer a bit. But that moment of emotion and delight had passed. Ark immediately returned to reality. He finally remembered about money. He had invested 32 hours into studying contaminated ingredients. He even destroyed 6 of Razak's ribs. But now they couldn't even reward him with an item he could use? He started to regret it while looking at the list of reward items. Ark stared at the list with a sour face and sighed.

“You don't like it? Then I could show you something else?”

Reid spoke immediately after seeing Ark's dissatisfied face. Ark had a sudden thought as he listened.

'Show me something else? Then I can select the reward for this quest?'

Ark thought that he had to pick one of those items as the reward. No, normally it was like that. But sometimes the system of compensation was different depending on the species.

'Then I don't need to decide hastily. The Galgin clan are peddlers. There might be something of use in their goods. Okay, I don't need to decided straight away and can wait until a good item appears.'

Then, Buksil approached and looked at the statue.

"Eh? This is a pretty well made statue?"

Ark kicked the pig's feet and smiled calmly.

"Like I said earlier, I didn't do that much. It looks like these items are precious to you guys so I can't accept it without feeling the burden. I'm sorry but could you show me other stuff?"

Ark didn't want to decrease the precious intimacy so he spoke gently but firmly. But Reid had good sense for a cockroach and notice.

"You don't need to feel burdened. The items we gave aren't valuable to you."

".....They're still great, that, um, so."

Ark was reduced to one syllable by Reid's powerful force and retreated. And the cockroaches gathered again.....

"Hey, is this good?"

"But is there anything to give to our benefactor?"

After consulting for a while, Reid returned with three new items. However, Ark still returned them. They were just like the first few items. The situation repeated so many times that even the cockroaches became annoyed. Of course, Ark wasn't feeling great either. He had been awake for 32 hours so his eyes were drooping.

'But I might receive a surprisingly good compensation. I can't just accept something useless because I'm sleepy. I have to receive something that can be somewhat useful!'

Ark desperately opened his eyes and persisted. The items Reid brought were completely random. In some cases, there were slightly useful items but they didn't meet Ark's expectations. When 2 hours passed, his spirit surged.

'Damn, okay. There will be nothing if this keeps on happening so let's give it a try!'

"Pass, pass, pass, pass, pass!"

Ark didn't look at the items properly and just called 'pass.' Reid who was tired from running back and forth with the items groaned pitifully. Now Reid started to realize that Ark's reason wasn't because of the 'burden.'

"Hey, it seems impossible."

"Didn't he go four days without any sleep?"

"At this rate we might be doing this for the next few days."

"It's impossible. Take out all your collections."

"If we don't find something fast then we'll collapse of exhaustion."

"But the really good stuff....."

The cockroaches hesitated and looked at each other. At that time, a young cockroach rubbed its eyes and said sleepily.

"Daddy, I'm so tired."

"Darling! Take out the item you're so proud of."

Reid's wife couldn't stand it anymore and shouted angrily. Then Reid flinched and said in a frightened voice.

"Ha, but these are....."

"Are those items more important than me and your children?"

"It's not that, but....."

"If you keep acting like that then I'll divorce you straight away!"

"U-understood, I understand. But these can't possible please Ark. Hik, okay. So don't glare at me like that. I'll show it to him."

When his wife glared, Reid grumbled but took out a bundle. Yes, they were merchants. And as mentioned before, Reid was a peddler who didn't engage in any business that would lose him profit. Of course, they felt gratitude towards Ark. But the Galgin were born peddlers and couldn't give the best items for free, even to their benefactor. So Ark was shown general items. And they thought he would just give up if shown the same items. They truly were merchants to the bone! However, even those merchants were forced to wave the white flag before Ark. Well, half the win was thanks to the glare from his wife.....

"Ah Ark, how about this? You don't like it either? Then I'll show you something else."

Reid showed a quick glimpse of the bundle before taking it back. That was a mistake. In fact, Ark had almost reached his limit. So he was about to say 'pass' automatically. If Reid had

showed it normally then Ark probably would've passed it. But his questionable behaviour stimulated Ark's curiosity.

"Wait. Please show it to me again."

"T-this? It's not a big deal. You don't need to see it again."

"Please show it to me again."

"Hahaha, there's no need. I'll bring something else immediately."

"Show, it, to, me, again."

Ark said firmly when Reid tried to escape. Then Reid turned around and looked at his wife with a desperate expression. He sighed at his wife's frown and put the items down. He added in a small voice.

"It's nothing much.....it's just a lamp I picked up when crossing the Urubasa Valley a few years ago. But it's broken and doesn't work. The other items are the same. They're just a toy and graffiti that I picked up....."

Dark Lamp (Special)Item type: Lamp

User restriction: None

An old magic lamp created by unknown people. Complex shapes are drawn on the bottom. This lamp is different from normal lamps, and will cause darkness instead of light when used. It is the greatest treasure of the Galgin who enjoyed napping but dislike bright places. As the owner of this lamp, Reid had been envied by other Galgin. However, you have to sacrifice magic ingredients in order to activate the dark attribute.

<When 10 magic ingredients are used as fuel, a radius of 10 metres will be plunged into darkness for 30 minutes. The same environmental effect as 'Night-time' is applied to the range of the lamp.

'W-what it this?'

His sleepiness quickly fled. He never imagined that there would be such an item. In fact, this item wouldn't be any use to an ordinary player. The cockroaches loved the darkness which is why they used the lamp. What ordinary user would take a nap? But this was much more important to Ark than a rare sword. The lamp would activate a 'night-time' effect in the area. Didn't that mean he could receive his darkness attribute bonuses even in the daytime? It was an item that could give him a 40% bonus at any time! What else did he need to say?

Thanks to his tenacity, he had found a pearl at the end of all his passes. The other two items were also vague but useful! They were far better than the ones shown previously.

Wisdom Ring (Special)

Item type: Special consumable

User restriction: None

This is a puzzle type item made of entangled wire and metal to create complex shapes. Although the history is unknown, it seems to be made by a pretty smart person. The solution is so difficult that it can raise wisdom depending on the level reached, with levels ranging from 1-5. But you have to be very smart to reach the 5th level.

<Every time a puzzle ring is undone, wisdom increases by 3. But the bonus will not be given if you are told the solution to the puzzle.>

One Thousand Visitors

Item type: Collection

User Restriction: None

This is a collection that a very famous calligrapher wrote down a long time ago. If you placed this in your store then it will increase your business.

<If you operate a store then you can receive a bonus 3% profit on the selling price of all goods>

Ark's eyes lit up. The 'Wisdom ring' was meaningless to Ark. Every time a puzzle was undone it gave +3 wisdom. That was a total of 15 wisdom. But wisdom was a stat that didn't really matter to Ark. But Lariette used Holy magic so wisdom was more important to her than strength or agility. The effect of Holy magic would vary depending on her wisdom.

'Well Lariette also went through a lot of trouble during this quest.'

Ark decided to concede the Wisdom Ring to Lariette. But Buksil didn't help so Ark had no intention of conceding any items to him.

'The One Thousand Visitors is a surprisingly good item. I can't give an item like this to the pig. Fortunately, the item is not restricted.'

Ark grinned and received the items. It was definitely the best reward he could get from Reid.

"Thank you. Like Reid said, it is use a 'broken lamp,' a 'toy' and 'graffiti' so I won't feel burdened if I accept these."

"You'll accept these?"

"Yes, I'll think of the Galgin every time I see these items."

Ark laughed while Reid gaped at him and tried to open his mouth. But the Galgin had been there for 2 and a half hours so they rushed to cover Reid's mouth.

"It's really admirable."

"Take these items as a sign of our gratitude....."

"Will you take these and go?"

"Let's meet again in the future. Hopefully the distant future. In the really, really far future."

Reid spoke in a tearful voice and ran away quickly. Ark had only been expecting to receive some pet exclusive items from the quest. In contrast to his expectations, he received some valuable items. Anyway, the touching quest ended with a funny skit.

"Lariette-nim, thanks for the hard work. This seems like an item that you'll need."

".....Thank you."

Ark handed the Galgin's Wisdom Ring to Lariette. She had also inwardly wanted the Wisdom Ring so she accepted it thankfully. After Ark handed it to her, Buksil approached with expectant eyes. But Ark just turned his head and said.

"Then I'll quit and rest for a bit. I'll see you in 6 hours."

Buksil grunted and exclaimed.

"Ah Ark-nim, aren't you forgetting something?"

"Huh? What?"

"That.....3 people completed this quest. So....."

"Ah, that? You're referring to that?"

Buksil sighed with relief at Ark's words.

"Hahaha, yes, that. Since you know....."

"It's okay, I don't mind at all."

"Huh? What are you.....?"

"Aren't you sorry that you were no help in solving the quest? It's okay, I don't care that much."

"No, it's not....."

Buksil noticed something strange and opened his mouth. But Ark hit first.

“I don’t mind keeping it. After all, I spent 32 hours not eating or drinking in order to complete the quest and you received experience from it. Even though you didn’t help and just napped while I was suffering, we’re still colleagues. I don’t have to feel offended by such little things, right?”

Every one of Ark’s words pricked Buksil’s conscience. And finally he couldn’t say anything. He could sense the hidden message ‘don’t be greedy for trivial items and hurt my feelings’ in Ark’s words. Buksil just laughed awkwardly.

“Yes, that.....that’s right. For understanding.....t-thank you.”

“Let’s stop this talk now. You’re my important colleague after all. Hahaha.”

.....So that’s how Ark received both the Dark Lamp and the One Thousand Visitors. Buksil’s mood was now gloomier but Ark had no interest in his feelings. He was still a guy aiming to strike at Ark’s back. He had no moral obligation to give items to someone disloyal. In addition, Ark had already considered a use for the One Thousand Visitors.

‘Huhuhu, I’ll sell it to Sid and make him place it in the trading post at Silvana. After the earnings increase then Sid’s monthly salary will also increase. Then I can receive the debt quicker and increase my secret funds!’

Currently the trading post at Silvana was earning thousands of gold. With a 3% increase, the profits would go up. Then Wolkosu could add some of it to the secret set of books. Ark just had to wait until he became the Lord of Silvana again.....Selling it to Sid would increase his secret funds. It was indeed killing two birds with one stone! What reason did he have to give it to a pig?

“Then I should start.”

Ark placed the polished lamp on his waist. Lariette and Buksil stood up and asked.

“Are we collecting ingredients?”

Whenever Ark said ‘Let’s go,’ they automatically stood up to forage ingredients. However, Ark shook his head.

“No, we’ll go directly to the destination.”

“Huh? But you still haven’t found the lab.”

“I already know where the laboratory is. Follow me.”

Ark replied with a smile. Ark had roughly guessed the location of the laboratory while completing the Galgin’s quest. The culprit of the incident.....was the polluted river water.

‘The Galgin might’ve provided me with a clue to find the laboratory.’

When Ark investigated the river using Ingredient Identification, he found that the river was polluted from various chemicals upstream. That meant the cause of the pollution would be found upstream. But the Netherworld hadn't developed alchemy so there shouldn't be that many chemicals.

.....Now did they understand what Ark meant? That's right. The genius alchemist who had come to the Forest of Life a long time ago! The chemicals polluting the river were probably coming from his laboratory. If so, the answer was simple. Just go along the river to find the source of contamination. Using that reasoning, Ark headed towards the river. How far did they walk?

River flowing through the Forest of Life.

The river in the Forest of Life is full of energy. It has various nutrients and abundant plant growth, which will have an excellent effect when cooking.

He was finally able to reach the point where the river was not polluted.

'The river was polluted just before here. So the chemicals should be flowing into it somewhere around here.'

Ark mobilized his pets, Lariette and Buksil to search around. Soon after, they found a cave hidden in some nearby bushes.

Cave filled with the odour of chemicals

You have found a cave with a terrible smell in the Forest of Life. An abnormal cluster of plants never seen in the Forest of Life grows around the cave. An unpleasant mucus also sticks to your feet. For a long time, even monsters and beasts won't appear around here.

<Explorer's Knowledge: New dungeon discovered bonus (Skill points: 10)>

The message window flashed once he entered the cave. Then there was a look of elation on Lariette and Buksil's faces. They were also in the top 10 users who entered the Netherworld and received the title of Great Adventurer. So they also received the same skill bonus as Ark for finding the cave. However, it did not remove Ark's tension. There were unexpected risks in a new dungeon.

"Dedric, Razak, scout around the perimeter."

"Okay."

Clack clack clack clack!

His two experienced pets also looked around nervously. And one step, one step.....they carefully entered the cave.

Ssak ssak, ssak ssak ssak ssak!

How far did they go? Suddenly Radun blinked and surveyed the area with tearful eyes.

‘Monster?’

Ark and his summons focused their attention and took an attacking stance. Then a hazy image appeared in the darkness. Dozens of monsters appeared while he was creeping along the cave wall. But there was something weird. They were floating in the air and seemed dead.

‘Eh? That monster.....?’

Ark cautiously approached the monster. And soon witnessed a strange scene. The monsters.....were trapped in a place that looked like a big water bag. To put it more precisely, they were being grown. From young to adult monsters, they were floating in the water bag like the clones that floated in a capsule in science fiction movies. He saw common monsters from the Forest of Life like the ‘Chimera=Kurometin’ and ‘Chimera=Bandit Fox.’ Ark finally realised why their names were so peculiar after seeing the capsules.

‘Chimera.....that’s right, it’s a common term.....in fantasy, chimera is a word used to describe an artificial monster. And this is Magaro’s laboratory. If that’s the case.....all these monsters were made by Magaro?’

After realizing this, he understood the peculiar abilities of the monsters. The Kurometin was probably used to protect the lab while the Bandit Foxes were used to gather ingredients to study. But after Magaro grew old and died, the controlling power was destroyed and they returned to the wild.

‘Once thing is clear.’

Just like the Magic Institute said, Magaro was a genius alchemist if he could artificially create monsters.

‘Well, it doesn’t matter since he died of old age.’

“Ah, Ark-nim.....”

Lariette came close to him and stuttered in an uneasy voice. Of course she would be scared being surrounded by dozens of deformed monsters in the darkness.

“There’s no need to panic. They’re all dead.”

Just like Ark’s words, all the monsters in the capsules had been rotting for a long time. But that just made it seem even creepier to Lariette who shuddered.

“I’m aware of that. But.....”

Ark just laughed at Lariette’s reaction. He was now 100% sure that this was Magaro’s laboratory. He assumed that Magaro’s laboratory would have documents piled up like mountains. In order to receive the quest reward, he needed to give the Magic Institute the documents found in the laboratory. And understandably, Ark had no thought about splitting it with Lariette and Buksil. It was natural. Ark had suffered so much trying to find this place.

‘Lariette-nim doesn’t know that Buksil is after Magaro’s legacy. I can’t be careless even when finding the legacy. This is a good excuse to keep Buksil in this room.’

“Then please wait here with Buksil. Looking at the atmosphere, there doesn’t seem to be any monsters. I’ll go on my own to look at the situation.”

At the end of Ark’s words, Buksil jumped with surprise.

“What do you mean? I’ve chased Ark-nim here to record your heroic adventures. But you want me to wait during this historic moment?”

“No, I can’t promise that there will be no danger ahead. And do you want to make Lariette-nim more anxious? Who will stay with her? That’s why I’m getting you to stay here.”

“B-but.....”

Ark scowled at Buksil who immediately shut up.

“I’m sorry.”

Lariette spoke in an apologetic face while Buksil avoided her eyes. Anyway, Ark left the two of them there and ran towards the treasure. The cave became increasingly brighter as he entered. It was a magical place to study medicine. A faint light glimmered from the cave wall.

‘Yes, all that medication. It made the entire wall glow.....if I had this at home then I wouldn’t need to pay my electrical bills.’

The electricity required to power the entire cave....would be out of the reach of normal people like Ark. Anyway, it was a lot of light for a large space.

‘Finally.....I finally arrived. The Genius Alchemist’s Laboratory!’

Was this the feeling of discovering a new continent? Was this how the adventurers felt when they discovered El Dorado? Ark inwardly cheered as he surveyed the area. The space Ark arrived at had numerous machines and experiments hooked up. On one side of the wall was a bookcase which contained numerous scrolls, books and colourful liquid medicine bottles. He had finally managed to track down the genius alchemist’s lab using a few clues!

‘It was a good idea to use Buksil.’

The scrolls and medicines in the lab were now in Ark’s possession. He didn’t know what the effects would be, but since it was the work of a genius alchemist then it wouldn’t be a common item. No, he could convert it into a large amount of money even if it was the low recovery potions. But the problem was the quantity. Even if he emptied his bag, he wouldn’t be able to fit everything in!

‘I don’t know what Buksil is expecting but I’m not that easy. I will discipline him again and make him sign a contract, then pack it in his bags and send him to middle earth. But what about the materials needed to complete the quest? The quest log says that the research materials are necessary to complete it.....’

Ark entered the lab with a wily smile. At the same time, a shadow watching from the corner of the entrance trembled.

‘Bastard.....I knew what you were thinking as soon as you split the group.’

The person trembling in anger was someone who Ark considered as a walking bag. It was Buksil. Buksil wasn’t stupid and knew the reason why Ark had visited the laboratory alone. So he spoke to Lariette about recording Ark’s historical achievement and blah blah blah.....then sneakily shadowed him. And he found Ark laughing in the laboratory. Just looking at that smile. His body trembled with anger like a Pepe seeing a dismantling knife. He could imagine Ark’s devilish plan. But a wild smile flashed on Buksil’s face.

“Bah, do you think this will go your way? That Ark bastard, you dared to make me work so much? But even after all your abuse and exploitation, the final winner will be me. I’ll make you regret messing with me!”

Buksil put his hand into his bag and grabbed his ‘secret weapon.’

‘Sapjil, Ulmeok, my younger brothers.....! Please give me strength from heaven (?)!’

Buksil clenched his teeth and made a firm resolution. Suddenly a voice was heard from behind the bookcase that Ark was reaching for.

“Who is it?”

Ark was frightened and retreated. Buksil was also shocked and hid behind the corner again. Then an old man walked out from behind the bookcase. He was an old man with white hair and beard wearing rags.....He stared at Ark and looked him up and down.

“Who are you? How did you get here?”

“Can I ask how I’m talking to?”

“Huh, what an interesting friend. You suddenly came to my house and asked me who I am. Well, it’s not like I hung a nameplate on the front door.”

“Somebody’s house?”

“Yes, this is my house. To be correct it is my laboratory.”

“Laboratory? No way.....are you Magaro?”

Ark asked the old man in a surprise voice.

“How do you know my name?”

Ark’s mouth gaped open. Magaro? He was Magaro? What absurd thing was he saying? According to the Magic Institute, Magaro had disappeared many decades ago. From the records, he discovered that Magaro came to the Netherworld 100 years ago. At the

time, Magaro was already older than 80 years.....if he was still alive then he would be over 200 years old. But the life expectancy in New World was 70 years old.

The granny Johansson he used Nursing on in the novice village died because her age exceeded 70 years. But 200 years old? Was he mistakenly looking for a dragon?

‘Oh damn.....what if he created the Elixir of Immortality using alchemy?’

Ark had no interest in whether he lived for 200 years or 2000 years. The problem was the piles of items in the laboratory! If they had no owners then Ark could just take the items. But if the owner was alive then how could he obtain Magaro’s legacy?

‘Dammit, dammit, dammit!’

Ark felt like grabbing the old man’s neck and squeezing. But even Ark wouldn’t kill an old man for his inheritance.

‘Then am I only able to receive the quest reward?’

Magaro had been watching him with wary eyes and asked again.

“You still haven’t answered my question. How do you know my name?”

“In fact.....I found you after being commissioned by the Magic Institute.”

“Magic Institute?”

Magaro was puzzled before he nodded.

“Ah, yes, that’s right, I think that answers it. After coming to the Netherworld, I jokingly sent some clues to the Magic Institute. Then you came here after putting all the clues together. I never thought anyone would get here.....how shocking.”

“Well, it was really difficult.”

Ark replied bluntly. Then Magaro clicked his tongue and muttered.

“But the Magic Institute is very strange. I know they have no patience, but I haven’t been missing for that long that they would send someone to look for me. Tsk tsk.....”

Ark retorted with an astounded expression.

“What did you say? As far as I know, one hundred and ten years had passed.”

“One hundred and ten?”

Magaro widened his eyes and burst out laughing.

“Hehehe, why are you joking? It’s only been 10 years since I’ve come to the Netherworld.”

“Huh?”

Ark replied with a stunned look. What did it mean? Had the Magic Institute lied to him? But why? No, it wasn't only the Magic Institute. Even the recorded history in the valley village.....

Then Magaro continued talking.

“They must've also hired you to play a friendly prank. One hundred and ten? Pfff, even I'm still alive then wouldn't I be a dragon? Well, apart from that.....yes, why did the Magic Institute send you? Did they want to say something to me?”

“They requested me to bring Magaro's research to them.”

“Research material?”

“Yes, the research material that Magaro had been studying in the meantime.”

Ark spoke calmly. Then Magaro's face twisted and the impression he was giving off completely changed.

“My study materials.....my research.....what I dedicated my whole life to.....”

The skin on his face started cracking and falling apart. The subsequent face that was shown.....looked like some monsters had been stitched together.....yes, it was similar to Frankenstein's face in a horror movie that had been created with graphics. While Ark was shocked by the sudden change, Magaro grabbed his hair and howled. A metallic voice seemed to emerge.

“Research materials, research materials, research materials! I stomached the pain and degraded my flesh! The research material that I dedicated decades of my life to! You bastard.....you wanted to hide like a rat and steal it from me? Are you trying to take my life? I dare you to!”

“P-please relax. Your blood pressure.....”

“Shut up, kill! I'll kill anyone aiming for my research!”

Suddenly Magaro shrieked. His body tore to pieces and a large monster emerged. The distorted body was painful to look at. Many spider eyes were nailed to the face, while the body looked like a lion with 10 arms attached. And there were bright coloured blister like things growing on the body. It was so horrific a monster that he felt like vomiting up his meal.....!

A red warning message floated in front of Ark.

-The boss monster 'Crazy Alchemist Magaro' has appeared!

[End of Book 10]